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THE INVISIBLE
BALANCE SHEET
KATRINA TRASK









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The INVISIBLE BALANCE SHEET

BY

KATRINA TRASK

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"IN THE VANGUARD," "KING ALFRED'S JEWEL," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

The miracle had happened—Spring had come! For many weeks She had been coquetting with the earth: shy and virginal, She had trailed Her delicate robe of green across the meadow, touched the fruit-trees until they blushed, tempted the flowers from the grass, and then had run swiftly away and hidden from sight, leaving a chill behind.

Now, in a night, She had decided to coquette no more—She had come like a Queen to receive Her investiture; She had put on Her royal robes and Her reign was established.

There was beauty everywhere. Each bare patch of brown was covered at last, and all the earth was an emerald glow where blades of grass stood up proud and springing with vitality and freshness that proclaimed the story of Life's renewal: golden dandelions and purple violets starred the bright green grass—a regal wealth of colour.

Eben Hankins came around the old farm house that stood upon the hill: he was a middle-aged man, tall, awkward and angular, with a face that



looked as though it might have been carved out of granite, inexorable, inflexible—until he smiled.

Having finished a long day of planting, he had taken off his overalls and brushed his thread-bare suit; his grim face shone from the clear cold water he had doused upon it at the pump: his grey hair was plastered with uncompromising severity across his high forehead.

Eben needed no wife to put him in trim; he often said, "A man can slick up a deal better without no woman botherin' 'round: he gets clean in no time if he's let alone, but a woman talks so much 'bout gettin' clean that it gives a man a relish to be dirty."

He began pruning some rose vines that climbed over the farm house. Suddenly his keen eyes brightened with an expression of homely satisfaction.

Coming up the hill was a young man; tall, sinewy and well-built, his bearing seemed to give him the right of way; he gave an impression of power. His large blue-grey eyes were well-set and wide apart, brilliant from changing lights: an irresistible fascination was in his face, a frank charm in his personality: there were, it is true, about his smiling mouth certain conflicting lines, suggesting that some things in his nature were at war with other things in his nature and that the impulses of his temperament were not always based upon the fundamentals of his character: one felt that he might be swayed by one course to-day

and by another course to-morrow; but it might be —one could not tell—merely the undeveloped, unevolved state of tempestuous youth: coupled with this suggestion, there was, also, a danger-signal in the lips which indicated a sensuous pleasure-loving nature; a nature given to passionate impulses and self-indulgences; these were, however, both well-balanced by the firm chin and brow. A student of physiognomy would have felt a question as to his future; there would probably be fierce battles to fight, there would come surging inroads and perilous waves that would threaten to overthrow the structure: the eyes had a clear, steadfast gaze that suggested the Ideal—the imperishable dream;—but those lines about the mouth betokened a hint of selfishness—and selfishness is the arch enemy of the Ideal, the perilous foe to the realisation of the dream. There was something so attractive about him that the most casual observer, interested in evolution, could not refrain from hoping that the prophecy of the eyes would conquer the suggestion of the mouth.

This young man, John Remington Wright, was the owner of the farm.

"Hello, Eben! How go things?" Deep, musical, attractive, rang the dominating voice.

Eben began a catalogue of casualties: John stopped him with a peremptory motion of his hand.

"Thunder! I don't mean in *detail*. What dif-



ference does it make if the calf *is* dead!—it has escaped the butcher's knife!"

"What deeference, Meester John? There's just the deeference of seven dollars an' fifty cents."

"O Eben, stop working: I want to talk to you."

John was carrying a bundle of books, strapped together; with accurate aim he flung them into a chair upon the piazza, and, turning suddenly, faced Eben with a look of determination.

"Eben, could you run this farm alone?"

Eben looked stolid:

"Wal, seein' as I've done it 'most alone for nigh on to ten years, I think I might do it a spell longer —on a pinch."

"That's not fair, Eben—I'm sure I've helped you, but I am tired of the whole beastly business." John tossed his head impetuously.

"That's nothin' new: you generally do screw 'round here as if you was in a trap.—Say, Meester John, you spend too much time on them books: a man can't mix books and farmin'—they don't go together, no mor'n fodder and fruit."

"Right you are, Eben, and I should never have tried to mix them if it hadn't been for Father—and the debt, and—and——"

"An' Mees Marion," Eben ended conclusively.

"Who said anything about Miss Marion?" John spoke sharply.

"The things you say out loud, Meester John, ain't the things you say the plainest."

John smiled good-humouredly.

"Well then, Eben, I will admit Miss Marion has been a compensation in this confounded hole, but I've hung on far too long. I couldn't leave while Father lived; he had made such colossal sacrifices to send me to College." Eben gave an emphatic grunt of assent. "I felt it was my duty to stay beside him in his helplessness; and afterwards—there was the debt! When he died last year I ought to have gone then, at once—debt or no debt—for I am sure I could have made *more* in New York than I saved by staying here: but I stayed on and on expecting every week to go—I fell between hay and grass: I haven't made a success of the farm—you needn't grin, Eben, I know I haven't! I constantly expected to go to New York so I didn't really take hold of the work effectively."

"Wal, you kep' busy—but bein' busy ain't work."

"Going after that confounded plough is work, all right, and I stuck to it this spring until the ploughing was done."

"Yes," said Eben with grim justice, "you did pretty good—an' you saved gettin' another hired man, but now——"

"Now," interrupted John, "the ploughing is all done——"

"Now," sententiously commented Eben, "the work's all to be done."

"That's the infernal bother with farming—you work and work—only to get ready to work!"

"I guess it's pretty much so 'bout any kind of work," said Eben.

With an airy wave of his hand in refutation of this unpleasant dogma John said,

"Farming isn't in my line: I detest it! Yet here I am in Elmcroft still."

"An' there is them books, another pile of 'em," said Eben grimly, pointing a horny accusing finger to the chair on the piazza.

"Eben, you deserve a thrashing! Your animosity to my books is abominable!—they are my life: if you thought I was going to sacrifice my *life* because I postponed my *career* you were mightily mistaken. I ought to have gone to New York the moment Father died, as I said: I could have made enough in Wall Street to pay off what is left of the mortgage."

Eben gave a gruff grunt: he had his own opinions of Wall Street; they were not flattering.

"Yes," John said reflectively: he was speaking to himself, he had forgotten Eben: "I should have gone a year ago—it's a case of the 'unlit lamp and the ungirt loin!' "

Eben broke into his reflection with a sharp question:

"The *what?*"

"Never heard of Browning, have you?"

"Yes, I know him—he keeps the feed store over in Glenwood."

"Not that one! The Browning I mean doesn't keep a feed store, but—he feeds my soul!"

"You don't say!" Eben looked sceptical.

"He has given me my resolution," John continued; "I will light my lamp and gird my loin."

"Now, you just take my advice, Meester John, don't use none of them new lamps that's advertised: if you want a light to go by, take a safety lantern. An' as for girdin' the thighs, don't you pay no attention to them advertisements neither: they're no good—Josiah got a belt an' it made him worse—an' cost a pile of money, besides."

John threw back his head and laughed. "Well then, Eben, in plain English, I'm going to New York next week, thank the Lord! I'm going to work hard—and win money and fame."

"Money ain't so easy to win an' fame's no good; fame's only folkses talkin'—if you'd leave them books 'lone an' work here more—more things'd be growin'—it's better to make things grow than 'tis to make folks talk."

"All right, Eben. I'll leave you to make things grow—whilst I make 'folks talk' in New York. It won't take very much more now to finish our debt—and if I could get a good chance to sell the place——"

John was interrupted by a sound from Eben. It was not a cry—it was not a spoken word—it was like the snort of an old steam-engine.

"Sell this place—where yer Pa lived—an' yer Grandpa lived afore him—an' his Pa lived afore him!—See them blue flowers over there!—or that's to say they will be blue when they open up



—yer Ma planted them flowers with her own hands!—sell this place—sell this place——"

"O hush, Eben! You sound like an old repeater, or an alarm clock! I won't sell it if you don't approve, but I've heard you say for twenty years that the ground wasn't fit, that it was nothing but a sand-bank."

Eben drew himself up with stiff pride.

"It's one thing to say yer say 'bout a thing, an' it's another thing to sell it. A man'll say his say 'bout his wife—but he won't sell her. I don't think much of this soil—that's a fact—never did, but it's the soil that's *here*, an' 'cause I talk 'bout it that ain't to say I'd part with it."

"We *must* sell it, or do something": John spoke impatiently, impetuously: "Don't you know I am a poor, poverty-stricken, penniless pauper?"

Eben smiled the grimest of smiles:

"You didn't think I thought you was rich, did you?"

John's face lighted with its characteristic flash of charm: he went up to Eben and took his horny hand:

"The farm and I would have gone under long ago if it hadn't been for you, Eben: you're a trump!"

"I ain't nothin' but what yer Pa an' yer Ma learnt me. I was twenty years old when I first come to yer Pa, but I was as green as a unbroke field."

"Oh, I say, Eben, it's rotten to be poor!"

"Wal, I don't know, I've seen lots of rich folks an' I don't know as I'd change places with none of 'em. I'm not sayin' that it ain't mighty handy to be rich but I wouldn't be them!"

"Why not?"

"They don't seem easy nohow—they al'ays look like they had their money on their mind, as though they was worrit for fear they'd lose it—now I ain't got nothin' to lose, so I ain't never worrit."

"The man who looks worried when he has money is a fool," said John, "but it's not the money I want—I want the things that money buys."

"What kind of things?"

"Beautiful things—artistic things—wonderful things!" John spoke with a passionate intensity.

"Wal, ain't you got 'em—look at that there blue sky an' them purple hills an' them trees! You couldn't buy 'em nohow no matter how much money you had—an' yet the Lord God Almighty's spread 'em all out for you an' me an' everybody to see—free."

"Unless one happens to be blind," snapped John.

"Wal, if y're blind y've got the feel of the South wind blowin' on yer face with the smell of the flowers—the feel of the North wind blowin' on yer face with the smell of the pines—an' the feel of the West wind blowin' on yer face with——"

"O give us a rest! I'm dead sick of nothing

but wind and sky and hills and smells." John looked at the sun and gave a sudden start.

"I must go! I have an engagement."

John dashed up the steps and into the house: Eben stood a moment looking after him: there was a relaxation about the corners of his grim mouth which John, and John alone, could bring; and as he saw the buoyant figure enter the low doorway of the old farm house, he shook his head gravely and said, "He'd be a very sensible lad—if he had a leetle sense."

CHAPTER II

THE great apple orchard of the Parsonage was in full bloom. The white blossoms touched with pink were rosy in the deepening glow; the arching sky was flushed with the glory of sunset: it was a marvel of loveliness; every tree stood robed like a bride for her bridal, trembling and blushing with beauty and with desire. The song-birds, in an ecstasy of love, flew in and out of the blossoming boughs, carolling their madrigals of love, of home, of prophecy. All was still except for the song of the birds. Suddenly the air was thrilled with the sound of the fresh, clear, heart-searching voice of a girl—singing:

"The laughing rills, from the ice-free hills,
Come murmuring over the lea:
They ripple and flow where violets grow
And hasten away to the sea.

The happy birds sing, as skyward on wing
They mount from the blossoming tree:
The glad world is gay with wonder-white May,
It is May for my Love and for me."

John stood waiting beneath a blossoming apple tree, listening to the musical voice as it drew nearer. Beyond the ancient orchard was the path

that led to the Parsonage: there old Dr. Meredith held sway over the minds and the hearts of the inhabitants of Elmcroft, and his daughter Marion shared his sovereignty. The path that led to the Parsonage was hidden by a copse of small trees, which concealed the coming of Marion; but John saw her before she came—he could divine the light in her eyes, the beautiful colour swiftly rising and slowly ebbing in her cheeks, the shimmer of sunshine in her hair—and his heart made haste to meet her before she turned at the bend of the road.

The poet tells us that "In the Spring, a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," but it was not "light fancy" alone that Spring stirred in John Remington Wright: since his pinafore days in the little schoolhouse by the brook, Marion had moved John to *serious thought* rather than to "light fancy"; he had pondered and studied her, and things relating to her, from his earliest childhood in most earnest fashion. She was always a psychological problem to him: even to his childish mind it had been a profound speculation as to how a creature who was so white, pink and golden, who wore soft dresses that didn't crackle as his duck trousers crackled, who spoke with a voice that always "made you feel all queer inside," could possibly climb the highest trees and run as fast as any of the boys—and much faster than Willy Bristo: how she, being a girl, could hold such extraordinary and obstinate opinions

about many things: how she could withstand him to his face—when he was quite right in his opinion—when he *knew* he was quite right.

Again, when he went to the Parsonage for his lessons with her father, who had prepared him for College, he had found that the toughest problem he had to solve was how Marion Meredith could do so many things at once. He sat in the old minister's study and there was no apparent interruption, but all the while he was declining Latin nouns he was conscious of Marion, here, there, everywhere, giving dainty touches in the house, working in the garden, in the parlour and even in the kitchen—singing all the while. He spoke glibly concerning the sides of a triangle, but he could not, for the life of him, make out how any one creature could have as many sides as Marion. When he sat beside the good Doctor in apparent concentration upon his work, he was following the light free step and gay carolling of Marion.

And there was no scientific proposition more absorbing than to discover the alchemy by which Marion made the stern old face of the Parson soften into smiles of tenderness.

But it was not until after he had come home from Harvard that the problem took on a personal colouring and formed itself into the deeper question as to how—if a man wanted to, he was not at all sure he wanted to, but if he *did* want to—he could ask anything so delicate, fragrant and



lovely to share a poor man's lot. Of course, he did not *intend* to be poor: he intended to go to the city and make for himself a world-wide reputation as a great financier, and after that to take his place in the world of national affairs—perhaps the world of international affairs.

But it would be many years before he could attain his goal and those years would be years of drudgery and self-denial; a few dollars a week and a room in some squalid boarding-house: he could not ask this fastidious girl to share *that*: he must wait until he had won his way, and by that time he would know his own mind.

There was no doubt as to his success: he surely would succeed in the end!—for what else had he studied, travelled and worked, accepting the sacrifices of his father?

His father had thought that Harvard and a student's life were fantastic nonsense, to keep a man from his rightful place as tiller of the soil; it had been said by the Book of books that "In the sweat of his face man shall eat bread," and this new-fangled experiment of getting out of the common lot found no approval in the stern and sturdy farmer: but even as he had been uncompromising in his theories of life, so old Peter Wright had been uncompromising in the keeping of his word—whatever it might cost! And when Mary, his beloved wife, lay dying and turned on him those mournful eyes, a softening of the heart had made him solemnly promise her that John

should have the equipment that her forebears had considered necessary for man.

To Peter Wright a promise was a promise; therefore, he had sent John to College: and though the crops had failed the next year, and his own health had failed the year after, John went through the four years at Harvard, and had spent his vacations in travel, at the command of his father, without knowing the extent of the sacrifices that were paying for this culture. When he came home and found his father a helpless paralytic, he understood: an enthusiastic admiration for the Spartan grit of the old farmer and an inherent sense of loyalty to the obligation which he felt laid upon him made him quickly resign his plan of going at once to the city: he took his place by his father's side: there he had stayed for two years struggling to master the common mystery of the ground. Eben Hankins confessed to his God that John tried his soul mightily—because he did more harm than good to the farm: he applied theoretical experiments from books to conditions which had existed before printing was invented—he tried high-falutin modern methods to old problems which existed when Abraham and Lot divided the land.

During those weary days of work and denial two things had brought a glory to John's life: the wide culture from the books he devoured through the winter evenings—drawing them from the State Library; and Marion, always Marion—with her

song and her laughter, the sunshine in her hair, the moonlight on her forehead and the stars in her eyes: her beauty delighted his latent artistic sense, inherited from his maternal ancestors; and her quick intuitive wisdom stimulated his evolving mind.

When his father died a year ago, John had still stayed on, expecting, planning each week to make the move and "to begin life," as he put it to himself: but many things kept him from going: nominally it was the mortgage and the debt: he told Eben constantly and he asserted to himself—too emphatically perhaps—that he wanted to clean things up financially before he went and to start on a fresh basis: also, that he could not bear to leave Eben alone to carry the brunt of the debt that had been incurred for him: but beside these motives—in which he was sincere, if self-deceived—there were unformulated reasons that kept him from going. He dreaded the drudgery and grind that must precede success. He knew that he must begin with a mere weekly pittance: whilst he was learning the great financial law and system, he must live in poverty. It was bad enough to be poor in the Country, that meant hardship—but to be poor in the City, he told himself, meant squalor—and he hated squalor: moreover he was deep in a course of special reading which he was enjoying immensely and wanted to finish and then—to be honest—he dreaded the thought of losing the comradeship with Marion. Together they read

and delighted in intellectual speculation, together they enjoyed Nature, together they studied and discussed new thought, together they dreamed old dreams.

Did he love her? Yes—no—yes—no—sometimes he was sure he loved her—sometimes he doubted it.

When he thought he loved her the bliss of her companionship and the joy of his thought of her were marred by the shadow of the consciousness that he must not be such a selfish cad as to ask her to share so humble a lot as his own: her lot was simple now—but, compared with what he had to offer at present, it was luxurious: the old-fashioned, spacious Parsonage made a fitting background for her: Dr. Meredith's salary and ample life-annuity were sufficient to provide father and daughter with every comfort and much luxury: Marion was cared-for and care-free: there was nothing to burden her nor to press upon her. She was clever of hand as well as clever of brain; therefore, her dressing was uniquely exquisite: she had money enough to buy beautiful stuffs and with her designs and co-operation most artistic gowns were evolved by local talent: in her dainty garments she had the fine air of a princess. When sometimes John felt a prescience of his future and his fame, and felt within himself the *right* to claim her—then he ruthlessly questioned the thing that he called his love. What did he know of love? What did he know of women? What women had



he seen? Was Marion delicious because she was Marion—or was she delicious because she was *Woman?*

Before he decided that question he wanted to see the women who lived on the other side of the hills that shut in Elmcroft—and him.

This weighing and considering the exact state of his own heart, whilst the heart of the girl is tossed like a foot-ball, back and forth, is not heroic —but it is, too often, the way of men—the lot of girls.

John was given to volatile and impetuous changes of mood: he was no model, no hero; he was composed of good and evil, of tempestuous strength and pliant yielding, of steadfastness and impatience, of generosity and selfishness, of impulsive self-forgetfulness and of egotism. He had moments of high-mindedness, when he knew his worst and aimed for the ideal which is the real: and he had moments of falling from his own high estate, compelled by powerful temptation: in supreme moments he had a quick vision of what life might be and in sensuous moments he took life as it presented itself.

As he watched the coming of Marion to the orchard, the spring making riot in his blood and his whole soul vibrating to the music of her voice, he was conscious of something rising within him to demand her: he wanted to be near her, to touch her. He knew Marion, however, knew her maidenly reserve, her exquisite dignity—so different

from the Elmcroft girls—he knew that she would not grant him even her hand to caress until he had lowered his lance before her and asked her for her colours—and would she, *then?*

She turned the bend of the road and stood singing, a moment, framed in the fresh green of the trees: her soft garments were blown by the wind, her head was held high, she looked like a figure of Victory.

As John went to meet her, and she held out her hand in cordial greeting, he found it difficult to curb the impulse rising within him: he wanted to do impossible things, to say unutterable words, but he lifted his hat and said simply:

"I did not walk to the Parsonage to meet you because I wished to keep our tryst in the orchard. Yes! it is May, Marion, 'it is May for—you and for me!' "

The pink deepened in her cheeks. She seated herself beneath a wide-spreading apple tree—John threw himself upon the ground beside her, his æsthetic sense noting how harmonious and beautiful a background the low blossoming branches made for her loveliness. He took off his hat and threw it from him.

"Marion, I ought to go to New York—and begin," he said.

"Yes," she answered, "I know you should: I have felt it for some time. How exciting it will be for you—but——"

"But what, Marion?"

"Oh," and she gave a little dramatic sigh of mirthful protest, "it was only the old argument! I wish you were going to a professional life—I should like to see you a lawyer or a man of letters —you have such splendid brains, John."

"Thank you," he said, "but my brains—such as they are—will have full play: a professional life, with all its glory, is a circumscribed career compared with the life I *intend* to have. Of course first I must earn freedom and independence: the mere making of money—to which you always object so strenuously—is only a part of my plan. There is nothing to prevent my being a man of letters—if I really have the ability—*after* I have made money enough and am free: but first I *want* money, I *must* have money, as the means to the end."

"What if the means should hide the end?" she spoke dubiously.

"My means won't hide the end, for the end is before me in the beginning. Of course I shall have to begin with absorbed and absorbing grind: I shall have to be a mere money-making machine at the start——"

"I know; and money-making machine men are such——"

"Such fools," interrupted John, thinking of Billy Waller. "But I hope to Heaven you don't expect me to be like that—like any of those idiots who loaf here in the summer time?"

"Of course *you* couldn't be, John," she said in

conciliating tones; "but I so fear you will forget your larger ambition—that you will become immersed in business."

"The life of a great financier is bigger than you think, Marion: that, in itself, is creative work! Business in its larger sense is really a profession: it appeals to the artistic—the constructive—the virile qualities in a man. To battle with great forces, to study and solve great problems, to build great railroads and to open up new countries, to weave great shuttles of commerce on the sea—Oh, it is fine!"

Marion looked at him with glowing eyes.

"I know," she said, breathing fast, "and then?——"

"Then to be a factor—a power in the world and to use that power—perhaps to make history! —meanwhile, to prepare for it, to have money enough to be at liberty to follow the great motive —art, literature—whatever it may be."

Marion flushed with pride in him: straightway she yielded her opinions, founded on the traditions of her life, and—John had repeatedly told her—on the narrowness of her provincial outlook: she gladly spread her wings to follow his flight. There was something in Marion's unexpected frank critical comments and analytical questions which always provoked argument and a degree of irritation in John, but there was something in her sympathetic response to his flights, and something in the depths of her eyes as she listened to him,

that always went to his head like wine and to his heart like music.

John, looking at her now, told himself that she was adorable. Suddenly a temptation flamed within him to throw everything to the winds—all the large future for the delicious present, all his dreamed-of career for the bliss of the Now: a mad desire for the immediate possession of Marion overswept him. Why should he not woo her, win her and marry her at once—to-day—take her home to the farm upon the hill—and content himself with being a farmer, after all? Farming would not be such a beastly lot with Marion beside him, as his bride! Of course if he went to the city, marriage would be out of the question, for two years at least, for he must begin at the very beginning with a green clerk's pittance:—here, at least, he had a house to offer her—even if it be but a farm house—the ugly hateful farm house he had always loathed! If he went he must wait for two years at least.—And there was young Waller coming when the hotel opened! Perhaps he would lose her for ever! He wanted her now—he must have her now! The temptation overswept him to yield to the ecstatic, compelling currents of the Spring.

Since childhood he had dreamed of ultimate success, great wealth and high place: his father had shaken his head, saying: "John, my boy, you can get nothing in this world unless you work for it—and work hard." His mother had said with

her winsome smile, "You will conquer, John. I see you in a larger world than Elmcroft: you belong there." To his father he had answered, "Why, Father, I love work!" "No," his father had replied, "you love exciting work, but you do not like grinding work, and that is the only kind of work which counts. A man must sweat at the plough before he can sow seeds in the furrows."

His mother had sighed—"I do not know how it will be: you have two elements in your nature, my son; I do not know which will conquer—but I *see* you in a larger place than Elmcroft."

And the years had passed and still he was in Elmcroft! And now on the very threshold of resolution he fell back from the fatal fault in his character, which his mother had foretold, the characteristic temptation to take *the moment* at the peril of the future.

As the fire was igniting in John's veins, Marion looked over the orchard and stretched out her arms as if to embrace that flowering world.

"What ravishment!" she cried: then she said merrily, "Oh, I wish I were Swinburne's lady and had 'my house beneath these apple boughs' and that 'my bondwomen' were 'all kinds of flowers.' "

"Would you be willing to live—in—in—an apple orchard, we will say—without luxury, without even comfort, Marion?"

With a sweep of her hand, Marion included the wide orchard—

"Where could one find a more enchanting house! The roof is a vast dome of blue, the walls are gothic arches of living white and the most costly carpet could not be more beautiful than this fresh grass with its wonderful flowers!"

John surveyed her—a glowing tribute in his face.

"Marion, you belong in a king's palace—there is not the slightest doubt of it." He hesitated a moment, then added conclusively, "Any man would be a brute to ask you to forgo your destiny."

Marion's lip curled bewitchingly:

"A king's palace!" She turned and picking a flower from the grass held it up: "'And yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.'"

John spoke impatiently.

"You are a minister's daughter, and it comes easy to you to quote Scripture texts: but we don't live in the New Testament—we are not the flowers of the field; we must be fed and clothed and live in properly heated houses."

"John, how dreadfully material you are!" There was a playful scorn in her tone but hot thoughts were surging underneath: for a moment she sat with veiled eyes then she added in a low voice which trembled a trifle:

"One would rather be food-hungry than heart-hungry."

To John darted a remembrance of his word to

Eben about his soul being fed: Marion's thought had met his thought, as so often happened in so many ways! How strange it always seemed—and yet not strange, only natural—and thrilling!

"Don't tempt a man beyond his strength, Marion."

"Tempt a man?" She smiled her radiant smile: "I was merely arguing a very interesting question. We always argue, you and I."

"It was only argument, then?" John said crisply.

"Don't be cross, John."

"I am not cross, but I thought you meant——"

"I did mean, it is my creed, it is a vital principle with me, you know, that *things* do not matter."

"Things do not matter?"

"I mean that some things do not matter so much as *some* things!"

They both laughed the light free laugh of youth when love is in the air.

"A very wise sentence, fair Portia."

"Wouldn't Father be scandalised at my logic and my English! But—but—you know what I mean, John."

All the orchard was still—even the birds had ceased their song. John leaned eagerly, beseechingly, forward. Marion took a quick resolve, born of her trust: she lifted her eyes and let John read them—within their depths lay all the fair shining of her soul—the secret of her virgin

heart: it was but for a moment, and the long lashes veiled again her eyes and her secret. John was altogether on fire—his last barrier of reserve broke down:

"Marion"—passion surged within John's voice —"Marion——"

A harsh cry broke the spell; it jarred discordantly:

"Meester John—Meester John!" and Eben Hankins came from the copse at the edge of the orchard and stood before them.

John's annoyance flashed: "What do you want?" he snapped at Eben.

"I want you."

John spoke with impatience: "Don't interrupt me. I'm engaged."

"You don't tell."

John flushed angrily: "I am occupied."

Eben stood his ground: "You oughter come," he said doggedly.

"Go!" John commanded sternly.

"What shall I tell the gentleman?" Eben asked bluntly.

"Tell him to go to the devil!"

Marion raised her hand in protest against John's wrath:

"John, would you not better find out what Eben wants? It may be important. How do you do, Eben?"

Eben bowed with awkward respect: there were few persons in the world who commanded Eben's

profound respect as this slight girl did. With anger in his tone, John hurled the question:

"What do you want, confound you?"

Eben, nothing daunted by an impatience he was well accustomed to, answered:

"What's the sense o' confoundin' me? It won't do no good to no one."

"Tell me what you want: waste no words."

"I never do waste, Meester John: yer Pa always said to me when I was a young 'un—'Eben,' said he, 'it was waste made the prodigal son,' said he, 'waste an' women,' said he. Now I ain't got no use for women neither, never had."

John's tone took on the tense quality that could silence men—even Eben.

"What is your message?"

"I was tidyin' up 'round the house, fixin' the rose vine by the door, the rose vine that yer Ma planted, when up swishes Hotchkiss' very best au-to-mo-beele—the one he keeps for the summer folks, an' out gets an old gentleman that looks like he owned the earth. He had a gold watch the like of which I never see——"

"What did he want?"

"He wanted *you,* to be sure. He wanted you *right away* on business of importance—very great importance, he said."

"He can't have me! Go back at once and get rid of him."

Eben's eyes rounded in protest. "You *must*

go! You can't afford not to go. He means money. You can see it in his shoes."

Marion laughed her lovely silvery laugh. "O Eben, how can a man mean money in his shoes?"

"I can al'ays tell by a man's shoes, Mees Marion. When they are made of that shiny stuff that you can see yerself in, like black lookin'-glass, an' when they are bulgy at the toes an' don't kink in, then it means money."

"Eben, you are delicious!"

"So are you, Mees. I al'ays said you was."

Marion's lovely laughter had mollified John.

"Tell your old gentleman friend I cannot come, Eben. I will see him to-morrow."

Eben still lingered protestingly.

"He said he must take the midnight train back to New York an' says he, 'My good man,' says he, 'you must search the town for Meester Wright. It's to his advantage,' says he."

Marion laid a light hand upon John's arm.

"John, it may be something really important. You would better go."

"But, Marion——"

The warm colour rushed over Marion's cheeks, brow and neck.

"Marion, do you *wish* me to go?" John's voice said many things.

"No—and yes. The no is selfish: the yes is the larger, truer wish."

"All right: run on, Eben. Tell your friend I'll be there in a few minutes. Make the old gentle-

man comfortable—and—Eben," he called after him, "mind your manners. You have everything but manners."

"So you al'ays say, Meester John, but no *one* man can have everythin'—tain't in nature."

John turned to Marion. Should he say the words that had been silenced on his lips?—No, never in the jangling jar of Eben's atmosphere, which lingered after he was gone. The moment had been broken; they must weave the spell again before the supreme question could be asked—such words as he had thought to say must have their fitting background of remembrance for all time—they must be said in leisure, in the isolation of a seclusion cut off from all the world—from presuming farm-hands, and from old gentlemen with shiny shoes.

"Bother Eben!" John's tone had changed. "Will you meet me in the orchard after the old duffer has gone? I have something very important to say to you."

Again the colour rushed to Marion's face. She hesitated a moment, the warm tide of feeling and desire surging through her frame—then in her heart she heard the echo of a great word, a strong and mighty word—HELPMATE. In that word was gathered all the memory of the mission of woman in the long annals of her sacrifice, her mercy, her heroism. With sweet and gracious dignity she said, "Not to-night, John. Eben said the man

is to stay until the last train—I have a strong intuition that this is a matter of importance."

"You have?" John's manner was brisk and eager.

"Yes—and you must keep the evening *entirely* free, to be with him until the last moment, if it *is* important."

John felt her graciousness in sharing his interests and was very grateful; but the May spell was broken, the rapture, like a gossamer thread, had been snapped; the moment had become a chilled thing—as chill as grey twilight after the sun has set—as unvibrant as the moment of reaction after wondrous music has suddenly been broken off with a loud crash. A creature of versatile and quickly changing moods, John was already fast speeding along new avenues of thought.

"What can any man from New York have to do with me?"

Marion was quick to note the change in John: and felt a sharp pang but, womanlike, she adapted herself to the demand of the hour: what mattered a momentary preoccupation—she had seen, she knew! Ah! she had looked into his eyes—nothing mattered!

"It may be about some property near here—one of the summer crowd who wants a clever man on the ground—but, whatever it is, I want you to be free to give him your time to-night until he goes. I will meet you"—the colour that flamed

her cheeks acted once more like fire in John's veins—"I will meet you here—at sunrise."

He mastered himself, and took her hand lightly.

"Thank you, my Lady of Grace. It won't be the first time that we have been together at sunrise, will it? Do you remember when we used to come out to find the fairies at dawn?"

"And do you remember," she said with tender memory, "how you always scoffed at me for believing that we should find them?"

A sudden depression fell upon her—a prescient pathos:

"I am sorry that I am grown up, John."

"Are you grown up, Marion? You still have the heart of a child."

"But the soul of a woman," she said: and once more John saw her revealing eyes.

"Good night, my Lady. Good-bye until the dawn."



CHAPTER III

When John entered the farm house he found awaiting him a stern-looking man whom he at once recognised as a man of importance and of power: he was tall, thin, angular, white-haired, clean-shaven, dressed with exquisite precision and neatness, and as free from dust as though he had stepped out of a steriliser.

"Is this Mr. John Remington Wright?" he said in formal tones as John entered.

John, with his natural grace, bowed ceremoniously:

"I am John Remington Wright. May I ask to whom I owe the honour of this visit?"

"I am William Grimes of the New York Law Firm of Grimes and Marvin." The stranger said this as though the statement settled his pre-eminence.

"In what way may I be of service to you, Mr. Grimes?"

If Mr. Grimes could have indulged in anything so flippant as humour, he would have been amused at the audacity of this youth with his free air of assumption; as if he, so bucolic and so young, could serve the Honourable William Grimes of the great Law Firm of Grimes and Marvin!

"Mr. Wright, your mother had an uncle, John Remington, for whom you were named." Mr. Grimes spoke in measured tones. John swore inaudibly: had he been called from that delicious hour to discuss uncles?

"Yes," he said aloud, "he occasionally came to see my mother before her death—seventeen years ago: I have not seen him since."

"He was my client and my friend," continued Mr. Grimes. "Your mother was an exception to his habitual thought of women: he had an affection for her—she was the daughter of his only sister."

John gave a slight shrug of his shoulders:

"Strange way he had of showing it."

A sterner stiffness fell upon Mr. Grimes.

"It is difficult, Mr. Wright, for the very young to understand the minds of the old: your father was not a favourite with your great uncle, Mr. John Remington!"

"I should think not! I have not seen my uncle since my mother died: I was only ten years old then: he is very shadowy and dim to me."

"He remembered you, and always spoke of you with zest."

"Indeed?" John felt his curiosity stirred: but Mr. Grimes' next words seemed to end all speculation.

"He is dead!"

John summoned what he felt to be the proper solemnity of manner:

"I did not know it, Sir; my uncle did not do me

the honour to keep in sufficient touch with me for me to be aware of his movements—even this last supreme one."

Mr. Grimes went on as though there had been no interruption to his recital.

"Some of Mr. Remington's favourite stories were about you, of the things that you said to him when, as a little chap, you went fishing with him. Do you remember going fishing with him?"

"Dimly."

"Do you recall the gospel of wealth which you then held?"

"Heavens!—No."

"He said you were very fond of money, and that one day when you were only six years old, you shook your yellow curls and said, 'Uncle, money's the *most* 'portant thing in the world. When I'm a man I'm going to fish for money 'stead of fish —and I'll catch it too; I'll let out the line, then I'll play with it a bit and then I'll haul it in, all silver and gold, and dollars and dollars.' I've heard him tell that story scores of times, roaring with laughter at the little 'blue-eyed, yellow-haired mercenary,' as he called you."

John's lip curled:

"He must have had a keen sense of humour."

John was conscious of a penetrating glance from the sharp eyes of the lawyer, through his gold-rimmed eye glasses.

"He had a keen sense of the fitness of things, Mr. Wright, which is vastly more important!"

John had evidently made a break—but what of it? What did he care for this man's thought of him, and yet he found himself saying in self-defence, "I suppose it never occurred to him to ask what was the motive which bred in me that mercenary spirit."

"There is generally a motive for everything—even in a child's mind."

John's dignity matched that of Mr. Grimes.

"My mother was *my* motive, Sir; she was ill, and she needed much care and many comforts, which, even as a baby, I longed to give her; child as I was, I realised that money was necessary as a proper caretaker."

"I think your great uncle assumed something of that kind whereby to balance such an extraordinary state of mind in a child, because—with his strict sense of justice, even to a child—he always added the further tale of his gift to you of a gold piece, soon afterwards: he said you kept feeling of it and turning it around; finally he asked you what you intended to do with it, to which you instantly and emphatically responded, 'Why, I'll give it to Mother.' He teased you by urging you to spend it, but you were obdurate, stamped your little foot, protesting that you *would* give it to your mother. This pleased your great uncle."

"Of course," said John, "*that* was the only reason I wanted money."

Mr. Grimes coughed a dry little cough:



"Mr. Wright, your mother has gone: has your desire for money gone also?"

"To be honest—no, it has not." John laughed spontaneously.

"May I presume to ask if you have caught it, as you predicted you would?"

"No—it is harder to catch than trout in winter. Poverty is still my portion—Poverty with a big P."

"Ah! Now we are coming to the point!"

"The point, Sir?" John's curiosity was aroused.

The lawyer took off his glasses, took from his pocket a very fine linen handkerchief embroidered with his initials, and leisurely polished the glasses with elaborate care; he began to speak deliberately as though he were summing up a case in court.

"Your great uncle, Mr. John Remington, was what might be called rich, Mr. Wright; his estate is estimated at about seventy million dollars."

John gave a low quick expletive.

"That strikes you as large?"

"*Rather!*"

"In his last will and testament, after certain bequests, he has left his residuary estate—half of it outright and the income for life of the other half—which is to be held in trust, to—to—let me see—what are the exact words of the document?"

The lawyer took from his pocket a long legal document, untied it carefully, unfolded it with an *aggravating* slowness, turned over page after page

and finally found the place he was looking for, and read—

"To John Remington Wright, the son of my niece, Mary Remington Wright (daughter of my respected sister, Mary Remington Atkinson), who did me the honour to give her son my name."

There was something almost appalling in the awe-struck sound of the two syllables which came from John's parted lips. Mr. Grimes continued in business-like tones—

"After certain bequests to friends and employees, the residuary estate amounts to about sixty million dollars!"

Again the two syllables were breathed into the air—this time with more emphasis—

"To ME?"

"To you, Mr. Wright."

"But he did not know me!—he never deigned to be aware of my existence after my mother died."

"True; as has been said, he disliked your father extremely."

"I must say, it was awfully good of him to leave it to me."

John was conscious of the utter banality of this fatuous remark but he was, as he confessed to himself afterwards, distinctly rattled—one does not inherit sixty millions every day.

"I do not think Mr. Remington was at all concerned with altruism in the matter." Mr. Grimes' voice had the effect of a cold blast on John's excitement. "It was purely a matter of family con-

sideration. In fact—I am here to give you the entire truth, Mr. Wright—Mr. Remington ever deplored the fact that you, an altogether unknown quantity, were the only available legatee of direct descent: but he was desirous that the estate should be kept for the present generation, at least, in the hands of a Remington: your great uncle had a strong sense of family pride."

"But I am a Wright!" John spoke loyally and proudly, a sudden picture of his poor paralysed father flashing upon him.

"Your name is John Remington—the *Wright* is a mere incident."

John curbed his hot impulse to reply. Mr. Grimes continued:

"Your great uncle knew enough of human nature to conclude that the inheritance would make you, to all intents and purposes, a Remington: and for that reason he hoped that you would accept the bequest."

"*Accept the bequest?*"

Mr. Grimes again coughed his dry irritating cough:

"There are conditions upon which the gift is dependent. In case you do not comply with the conditions the residuary estate goes to another."

John scarcely breathed. What were conditions? In the twinkling of an eye the whole earth had changed beneath his feet—minor details were of no account.

Again, Mr. Grimes turned to the document:

"I will read to you, Mr. Wright, the precise wording of the conditions." Then in his most colourless tone he read: " 'The said devise and bequest to my said grand nephew, John Remington Wright, are upon the following express conditions, however, upon the faithful performance and observance of each of which, only, it is my will and desire that my said grand nephew shall possess and enjoy that portion of my said residuary estate hereby bestowed upon him. First, that the said John Remington Wright shall not marry.' "

Mr. Grimes looked at John through his gold-rimmed glasses as though he were watching the effect of a chemical upon a live animal.

"*That I shall not marry!*" John's tone matched his face.

Mr. Grimes repeated the words:

" 'That the said John Remington Wright shall not marry.' "

John made a gesture of impatience:

"He had no right to make such a condition."

Mr. Grimes drew up his slender figure until it was positively austere: his voice was as cutting and as colourless as a bleak March wind:

"As your great uncle, Mr. John Remington, was giving his own, he assumed the right to give it in his own way: a custom not unusual with testators."

John met Mr. Grimes' severe eyes with a challenge:

"Who denies that right? I don't. I am a Wright—no Wright wants the money of a Remington! I was thinking of the subject in a purely impersonal way. Such a condition is void because it is contrary to public policy: *it has been so held.* If my uncle did not know this the counsel who drew his will should have advised him of it."

John's self-confidence over-topped his natural modesty: he had been taking a stiff course of legal reading during the winter and felt just at present absurdly familiar with legal rulings and phrases.

Mr. Grimes' voice became colder if possible and sharpened by keen sarcasm:

"I, Sir, was the lawyer who drew the will. Doubtless I was gravely at fault and signally failed in my legal obligation."

John's grand manner suddenly collapsed: the sense of mental superiority, which was natural in the narrow Elmcroft life, did not stand him in much stead when he came in contact with the austere William Grimes, Esquire, one of the ablest lawyers in New York: he felt very small indeed and spoke awkwardly with much embarrassment:

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Grimes, not at all!—I—I beg your pardon."

For a moment there was silence: then Mr. Grimes, ignoring the personal, continued: his voice had the monotonous persistence of a metallic instrument:

"My client had excellent reasons for his judgment of women—most excellent reasons; he had

an opinion of women which was unalterable; how far it was a just opinion is not for me to say: he felt that, though women are somewhat necessary for the perpetuation of the race, they are unfortunate adjuncts in the scheme of creation. Personally he owed them an unforgettable debt of bitterness: after the year 1851, he avoided having any women in his life whatsoever. He made your mother a slight exception to his rule."

John scarcely heard him: he was recalling out of the far past a discussion between his uncle and his father, which his childish ears had overheard.

"He was a monster!"

"Mr. Wright, permit me to say, it is scarcely seemly to strike the dead hand that has just given you sixty million dollars."

"Given me nothing!—he makes it absolutely impossible for me to take it."

"That is for you to decide."

"I have already decided."

"Already?" Mr. Grimes' cold, neutral tone was as if he were talking of some purely incidental, abstract matter. "Would you not better think twice before you throw away sixty million dollars?"

The very neutrality and impersonality of the tone checked John's volcanic mood.

"And, pray, are there many other conditions?"

"There are two other conditions." Mr. Grimes returned to the paper in his hand, and finding the place, read—" 'Second, that he shall at all times



maintain in proper state, and during the entire period of his natural life reside in, the house built by my father, John Remington; and, Third, that he shall personally supervise all the details of the management of the estate devised and bequeathed to him, personally superintending the receiving and receipting for the rents, issues and profits thereof, the cutting the coupons from all bonds which may constitute part of the estate, keeping accurate account thereof: and giving personal direction to the carrying out of the matters provided for in relation to the trust estate created by this my last will and testament in accordance with the directions herein contained. And I do further order and direct that, before entering upon the possession of any part of the estate herein devised and bequeathed to him, he shall execute and deliver to my executor an instrument containing a covenant to observe and perform all of said conditions according to the true intent and meaning thereof; but said instrument shall in no wise alter the effect of a breach of either of said conditions nor prevent the divesting of the estate vested in him pursuant to the provisions of this my last will and testament by the breach of either or any of said conditions. But it is my intention and desire that, upon the execution by my said grand nephew, John Remington Wright, of the covenant aforesaid, he shall enter into the full possession and enjoyment of the said one-half part of my said residuary estate without being compelled to

give further security for the faithful observance and performance of the conditions aforesaid than his solemn promise, embodied in the covenant aforesaid; and I do order and direct my executor to turn over to him the said one-half part of my said residuary estate as soon as the administration of my estate by my said executor shall have been completed.' "

Mr. Grimes, folding the will, looked narrowly at John: "I, Sir, have the honour to be that executor—as you will see when you read the document. Perhaps you will now agree that my client had a sense of humour."

"A damned sense of it," John muttered hotly.

"Mr. Wright, I knew your esteemed great uncle for fifty years, and I never heard him make use of that word."

"What word?"

"Damned."

"It would have been much better for him if he had used it as his chief form of speech," John fired.

"I fail to see any virtue in profanity. Your great uncle was a man of few words and those words were chosen with discrimination, and spoken with accomplishment."

"It strikes me that he was a prig—and a pharisee!"

Mr. Grimes' manner had the effect of an irritant upon John—and he spoke without weighing his words:

"I beg that you will guard your tongue, Mr. Wright, in speaking of my client and my valued friend for over fifty years: your great uncle was a most estimable and admirable gentleman."

The quiet voice of Mr. Grimes needed no emphasis, the underscoring of his sharp eyes was sufficient to put his words in italics.

"Pardon me, but he was a lunatic! It is quite clear that he was a raving lunatic!"

Mr. Grimes' sharp eyes gave John the cold discomfiture of a cutting blast.

"I drew the will, Sir, as I have said, and I can testify to his exceptionally sound, sane and discerning mind."

The room was silent—except for the crinkle and crackle of the paper as Mr. Grimes carefully folded the will and neatly tied it with the red tape. When he had smoothed it to his satisfaction he held it out to John:

"Here is a copy of the last will and testament of your great uncle. I will leave it with you to read at leisure. It is long, and to the lay mind is, I fear, rather complicated, for your great uncle was involved in many enterprises both personal and altruistic, but I have made copious notes on the margin and have added memoranda; therefore, I trust it will not be altogether unintelligible to you. I fancy you can grasp the essential points."

John looked amused:

"I fancy so."

Mr. Grimes gave him an inquiring glance over his glasses:

"There are many technical points but those I can explain later. I will return to the hotel for dinner."

John, with impetuous and reckless hospitality suggested that Mr. Grimes should, instead, share the frugal supper at the farm, inwardly smiling at the thought of the extreme frugality of the supper that would be set before the elegant Mr. Grimes. Mr. Grimes, however, courteously declined the invitation and added:

"I am leaving for New York on the midnight train, Mr. Wright; before I go I desire to know your decision in this matter, and, if you decide to accept your great uncle's bequest, I desire also to have you sign the paper which I have prepared."

"Mr. Grimes, will you tell me why—if I were such a fool as to consider the bequest—I should have to sign a paper?"

"It is so provided in the will, as I have already read to you from the document."

"But why?" persisted John. "Why is it so provided?"

"Because," replied Mr. Grimes, "your great uncle was not content to leave the matter upon the basis of the consequences of the breach of a condition subsequent, which is in the last analysis an appeal to sordid consideration, but he desired to place it upon the surer foundation of the obliga-

tion of a covenant, thereby giving us a more certain and abiding confidence in your continued co-operation. Men as a rule do not break covenants: your great uncle felt quite confident that no Remington would, under any circumstances, do so perfidious a thing."

Mr. Grimes took from his pocket his handkerchief and polished his glasses for some time in silence, then he continued in his judicial tones:

"Your great uncle was a man of many vast and complicated enterprises which require prompt attention: as they are enterprises of a private and confidential nature, he desired that he—or I, as his representative—be assured of your co-operation with us before they are communicated to you. Moreover, there are certain personal matters which your great uncle desired communicated only to his residuary legatee: therefore, he desired that I, as his representative, should assure myself beyond a peradventure of the co-operation of that legatee before communicating those matters to him."

"But *why* sign a paper? Would not my word be sufficient?"

Mr. Grimes smiled his chilly little smile:

"A written covenant, Sir, will have the advantage of possibly protecting you from *yourself*. You were in effect a stranger to your great uncle but he did you the honour to assume you were a man of your word: he knew that you inherited integrity and honour from generations of Reming-

tons: but he knew full well the temptations to which young men are prone from the heat and caprices of youth and he felt that if you were safeguarded by a visible document it might be easier for you in case such temptation arose: he desired to avoid the embarrassing situation which would occur if you were given, through me, his full confidence, and entered into a co-operation concerning certain matters precious to him, and then failed in the event; that is to say in measuring up to the expectation entertained by your great uncle of your integrity, truth and character. He knew that a solemn covenant, as a condition to the vesting of the estate, would insure your observing the conditions: in which case his hopes and his expectations would not be frustrated."

"I see," said John limply, although he did not see in the least.

"Your great uncle was a man of prompt action and was greatly opposed to temporising in business. Let us follow his example. The matter can be settled to-night, Mr. Wright, as well as later and then we may proceed at once to the communications and the formalities. I shall be pleased if you will wait upon me at the hotel and give me your decision."

"I have told you, Mr. Grimes, that my decision is already made."

"Mr. Wright, I beg you will take the advice of one old enough to be your grandfather—one who was your great uncle's closest friend, and, I am

proud to say, his adviser and counsellor—never decide any matter without giving it a second thought."

Mr. Grimes felt that he was being loyal to his old friend, John Remington, in bearing patiently with this trying young upstart.

"Pardon me, Mr. Grimes, but Emerson says 'Beware of second thoughts.' He maintains that our *first* spontaneous thought takes us more directly to the truth and that second thoughts blur the vision."

Mr. Grimes' features assumed their professional sharpening:

"Mr. Emerson, Sir, was speaking of 'hitching wagons to stars' and various other like eccentricities, concerning which he would probably have been silent had he thought twice before he spoke: but regarding practical money matters, I am of the opinion that Mr. Emerson was sufficiently sensible to have thought several times before refusing sixty million dollars: Mr. Emerson was a New Englander, Mr. Wright."

"I regard Emerson as one of the greatest men who ever lived," blurted John emphatically.

"Indeed?"

Mr. Grimes' tone in uttering that single word seemed to sum up his opinion of John—and also of Emerson. After a brief pause he continued:

"It is just six o'clock—there are six and a half hours before I leave Elmcroft: that is ample time for the decision, if you concentrate your entire

mind on the matter. May I expect you at the hotel about ten o'clock?"

"Most certainly I will come, Mr. Grimes," John spoke with his charming grace; he was ashamed of the irritability he had been tempted into betraying, in his excitement; "I will come to thank you again —as I do now—for all the trouble you have taken on my behalf: but—as for my decision—I have already told you, that is made."

"The brain, Mr. Wright, is composed of many cells: you have, as yet, opened only one cell—and that in great haste. Permit me to say you are obligated to give the opportunities offered you due consideration. You owe it to your great uncle, who has generously and unexpectedly endowed you with a possibility of vast opportunity: moreover, you owe it to that estimable lady, your mother, to open other cells in your brain before you decide the question submitted to you."

"That is quite true," John replied quickly—his mind immediately beginning to travel new lines of thought, filled with tender pictures of his beloved mother.

Mr. Grimes held out a letter: "Here is a letter for you from your deceased great uncle, Mr. Wright."

When John touched the letter he had an uncanny feeling; it was as though his living hand had come in contact with a dead hand. He bowed to Mr. Grimes without a word.

"May I ask, Mr. Wright, what that extraordi-

nary—that *most extraordinary* man of yours has done with my hat and coat?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!—Eben!" John called.

Eben came so quickly that, if he were any one but Eben, it would have suggested eavesdropping. Eben would never stoop to eavesdropping—his general interest, however, would keep him near enough to gather crumbs of information by observation: such gathering was consistent with his rigid code of honour.

"Eben, did you take this gentleman's hat and coat?"

"Yes, Meester John. I'll get 'em."

Eben went into the hall and returned with a tall beaver of the newest form and a smart spring overcoat of the newest cut: he handed them to Mr. Grimes, his eyes still following them with vivid curiosity.

Mr. Grimes slowly and deliberately regarded Eben from head to foot as though he were a subject of scientific interest and with such a curious expression that John found himself wondering, even in his mental excitement, what could have been the encounter between these two before he had arrived. As John walked with Mr. Grimes to the car, he heard Eben give an enigmatical grunt of a laugh. When the car sped away John was tempted, for a moment, to question Eben as to the comedy—or possibly the tragedy!—that had previously taken place, but the turmoil in his own mind was so overpowering that he could not stop

for asides. As soon as the car had disappeared amongst the trees, he went quickly into the house and ran up the low flight of stairs to the room at the head of the stairs.

"Mary Jane says supper's ready," Eben called after him.

John tossed his head.

"Give it to the cows—don't bother me."

Eben's jaw fell.

"Ain't you goin' ter eat no supper?"

"I've a Barmecide feast, to-night—and that's enough for my digestion."

Eben looked a stolid reproof.

"So you've had supper at the Parsonage! You'd oughter tell folks sooner. It's wasteful to have good victuals cooked that ain't e't—it's riotous livin'."

The room John entered was small, but its books spoke silently of a large world. Eben had put up plain shelves from the floor to the ceiling and John's beloved books lined the room. Spending-money had always been scarce with John but whatever he could scrape together was spent mostly on gifts and books; his old battered desk was drawn near to the open window: from there could be seen a wide sweep of meadow land fringed with trees that, without the impertinent interference of man, had grown wide-spread, luxuriant and beautiful: these trees always seemed to John to have living personalities. Beyond the

meadow land were wonderful hills ever changing in the lights and shadows that fell across them.

On the desk were exquisite and delicate articles that looked curiously inconsistent with the masculine confusion of the room. His mother had brought from her old home a few possessions which she always cherished. John, with instinctive feeling for art, had chosen the best of these to make the atmosphere of this room which he called his "work room," and which Eben called the room where John went to get away from work. The top of the desk was a strange, a smile-provoking medley: an exquisite Tanagra figure stood near a mechanical contrivance which John had been testing on the farm—a dainty graceful dancing girl of golden china stood next to a large hideous pair of rusty shears—a vase of fine Venetian glass was pushed aside for a pile of pebbles gathered for some farm purpose: the medley was indicative of John's life; perhaps, also, of his nature, which nature was a curious mixture of the sturdy and the exquisite.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN went to the old and battered desk before which he had spent many hours of ambition and of hope: he leaned his arms upon it, clasped his hands, and sat as one dazed—looking straight before him. The sound of the hoarse croak of the frogs, in the pool back of the house, came through the open window; and through the large cracks in the closed door could be heard the ticking of the old clock in the hall—that clock which had ticked away so many generations of Wrights, and had ticked John's young and buoyant life to the crisis of this moment.

"Sixty million dollars!" he said, at last. "Sixty million *dollars*—Sixty *million* dollars—*Sixty* million dollars! God in heaven—SIXTY MILLION DOLLARS——!"

For some moments he sat motionless. At last he reached out for the letter Mr. Grimes had left with him. Again, as he touched it, he had the curious feeling that his living hand had come in contact with a dead hand. His imagination made him shrink from breaking the seal—and yet—his curiosity could not break it quickly enough.

"MY DEAR GRAND NEPHEW,"—he read,

"You are the nearest living descendant of the

House of Remington. My pride in that upright and honourable family finds its outlet in you.

"I remember your desire for money when you were a little chap and—because you are a Remington and because you are your mother's son and because you bear my name—it pleases me to fulfil that desire: but anything that is worth having is worth paying a price for, and I expect you to pay a price for the bequest which I purpose to leave to you. I have made three conditions upon which the bequest is dependent.

"The first and principal condition is that you do not marry. My reasons for making this condition do not concern you, nor would they be agreeable for me to state, but they are sufficiently important to make me consider them in the final disposition of my property. Therefore, unless you can fulfil this condition, my residuary estate must go to a very remote relative—whose name happens to be Remington.

"Half of it is a free gift and the income of the other half. This other half will ultimately go to various Institutions: but for a generation longer, pending the winding up of certain enterprises and the development of certain investments, I should like to have the entire estate remain in the hands of our family. I should greatly regret the disposition of my estate to the other legatee, which would become necessary if you refuse to fulfil the conditions of this acceptance: but much as I *should* regret it, it is preferable to having a woman

installed in the old Remington house where my mother, your great grandmother, and my sister, your grandmother, lived their honourable lives.

"If the women of the present day were made after the manner of your great grandmother, my mother, who passed on some of her virtue to her daughter, your grandmother, I should doubtless be inclined to forgo the debt of doubt which my personal experience has left me; but when I read the records of the divorce courts—when I walk the streets and see the wanton and shameless exhibition at every street corner—when, even in the House of the Lord, on Sundays, I see the thinly covered bosoms and the outlined limbs of the ladies of the congregation: when I drive in the Park and contemplate the babies in the hands of ignorant nurse maids of a low order of immigrants, instead of with the mothers whom God has given them, I am the more persuaded that my conclusion is a correct one and not to be changed. I feel that it would be as prudent to put gunpowder in the hands of a monkey as it would be to put the power of money in the hands of a woman: and the trend of modern license (falsely called progress) is to put the possessions of the husband practically into the hands of the wife. Therefore, I make as the condition of my bequest the promise that you forgo marriage, to which you might be tempted by the heat of youth.

"There is a second condition—as stated in the will—viz., that you live in the old Remington

house where your family has lived for three generations.

"There is also a third condition—as stated in the will—it is that you shall take personal supervision of the estate—attending to details and to the enterprises and investments according to memoranda left by me with William Grimes, Esquire—that you may come in constant touch with the estate and have a realising sense of your money and your responsibilities.

"As I have had my experience with women, I have had, also, my experience with the reprehensible negligence of clerks; and I do not wish the money which I have amassed, by strict attention to business, to be carelessly or indifferently dealt with. All this is stated in the will, but I have asked Mr. Grimes to hand you this letter wherein I more emphatically set forth the matter. I desire that you form a final decision before you are put in possession of certain facts, bearing upon my testamentary wishes.

"There are certain enterprises, for the future of which I have plans, which I have elaborated in a long statement in Mr. Grimes' possession. Of all these details, Mr. Grimes will hand you memoranda, and can inform you and advise you fully, if you decide to accept my conditions. It will not add to the efficiency of my plans to have many know of them: moreover, there are certain matters which have to do with my personal history, concerning which I have a natural reserve, and I



do not wish to take more persons than necessary into my confidence: therefore, I would have Mr. Grimes quite convinced of the reliability of your continued co-operation, before he lays these matters before you. There has been ample provision made to meet these testamentary matters. All the rest, residue and remainder of my estate I give to the beneficiary, half outright and the income of half of it for his life. I should like that beneficiary to be the son of Mary Wright and the grandson of my virtuous sister; but I must ask you to make it a matter of conscience to avoid shilly-shallying in accepting the bequest: let your decision, once made, be binding upon your honour —for the reason hereinbefore stated.

"If you happen to be such a fool as Solomon in his wisdom deplored, you may prefer the possession of folly, extravagance, shameless vanity and falsehood (by which epithets I sum up any possible wife that you might choose) to the possession of vast opportunity, large influence and great power: in that case I have nothing to say. But if you have wisdom to see the advantage of vast opportunity, large influence and great power you will accept the bequest. Once you have decided to accept, you must abide by the decision, bound by the integrity and honour of your word.

"Your mother (although she was a woman) was completely true: in spite of her folly, she had a very admirable quality of directness and truth. Your father (whom I never liked in the least)

had a saving grace of integrity: no one could doubt him, however much one disliked him. Therefore, I believe you to be a man of your word; it is your inheritance.

"Moreover, I have taken pains to investigate your record at Harvard and I find that untruth is not amongst your faults. You will consider and decide if the money is worth the price I demand; and once decided, the decision must be final.

"That no wily ways of women may, later, have the possibility of making you forget your promise, and turn your back on the responsibilities you have once assumed (sacrificing your deliberate judgment to temporary temptation of the senses) I have asked Mr. Grimes to draw up a covenant for you to sign in case you decide to accept the bequest on the conditions hereinbefore stated. I do this to save you from a subsequent temptation to break your word, which might prove stronger than your inheritance of integrity.

"I remain,

"Your Uncle,

"JOHN REMINGTON."

"The old lunatic is right." John spoke as though he had been running fast. "I must take it or leave it, and have done: one cannot play fast and loose with sixty million dollars: if I decide to take it—*if?*—Why, I have decided! I *have* decided!" His hand, with the letter in it, falls to the table. He does not see the little room, the



battered books, the dim study lamp: he is standing in the apple orchard—he sees the light in Marion's eyes—the loose curls of her shining hair upon her forehead—the colour coming and going in her cheeks—the suggestion of a dimple in the corner of her adorable mouth; what would sixty million dollars be to a kiss upon that dimple? Ah, for one delicious moment to have her in his arms, to drain her sweetness! And yet—after that moment—what? What for him? And what for her? Let him be quite generous and just: has he a right to take that exquisite creature to poverty, care and, perhaps, to want? He is a man and he can make his way—but can he? In any case, the pleasant time of success is far off!—sixty million dollars!—he dare not think of it—*sixty million dollars!*—it will be two years, at least, perhaps longer before he can claim her, and in the meantime she is blushing unseen in this godforsaken hole—let him be a man and stand out of her way and give the city fellows a chance! There is that rich young Waller who is simply crazy about her; he came one summer to hunt, and has come since to hunt—Marion! There are others—no matter for their confounded names—what right has he to bring her to his desolate, dreary farm, or to keep her waiting while he toils and moils to get his few pennies together before he can ask her to marry him? *Ask her?*—why—to all intents and purposes he *has* asked her!—in that rosy moment in the sunset, beneath the apple



boughs! Nonsense! NONSENSE! What had he said? *Nothing!* Absolutely nothing! Eben came at the very moment he was *about* to speak—and saved him!—*saved him?*—*Sixty million dollars!!* —Is it not conclusive that he had had no real thought of marriage? Eben can testify to that. At five o'clock he had told Eben he was surely going to New York—he *intended* to go next week —his plans, his purpose, his decision were all made to go—to leave her free—and to be long enough away from her *to really know his own mind:* if everything nearly broke down *for a moment* before the madness of the May lure—what of that? is he to be bound by that momentary madness? All these years he has walked beside her, keeping a check upon his tongue and building up an honourary protection of her, against his own desires—if, to-night, it was almost swept away by the delirium of her prescient sweet surrender—must that count against the years?—Her *surrender?*—John started; he jumped up and began to pace the floor of the little room; a hot colour spread over his cheeks, up into the line where his hair grew upon his forehead. Was it surrender? Had she given a silent *answer* to the unasked question—*understood?*—was he in honour bound? Bah!—what a conceited cad!—how *dare* he take a reflection in her eyes of his own mad desire for *her confession!*—how does he *know* she even knew his thought, she is always gracious—but he *does know*!—Ah! does he?—he *told* her he wanted to

talk to her, had something important to say to her! Yes, but that was nothing—he has said the same to her for years—they are such excellent comrades—and *she* has said the same to him, time after time—and when they had met, it had been only some new plan or scheme of life and pleasure, some new discovery in a book—or on a subject they wished to share each with the other—why, only last week he had received a note from her—"Come at once, I have something important to say to you"—those were the *very words* he had said to her to-night!—and when he had gone to her, it was merely a question concerning her father—would she not think those words of his to-night meant something casual, in the habit of comradeship? It is true he had, in the delirium of Spring, in the madness of the moment, intended *this time* to say the different, the deeper and the final word—but how could *she* know that? He had been saved from his own delirium as by a miracle—he had not spoken—NOT A SINGLE SYLLABLE! Fortunately Eben had interrupted him at the very moment he was about to speak—*Fortunately?* Is it fortunate?—Yes, for now he is free to decide the question without considering that point of honour. Decide?—Why, he *has* decided! He has decided to throw over *sixty million dollars* for Marion!—and yet—after all—*perhaps* she does not care!—how can he be so conceited as to take for granted that she loves him—even if he *does* love her—Ah! *does* he love her?—In this cool

reaction, away from the intoxicating spell of May madness and song-birds and spring-beauty —in this little poverty-bare room of strenuous reminder, he is not so *sure* that he *does* love her—and *if* he does—then the old question! How can he put upon her the grievous, the intolerable burden of poverty? If he stays here, there is no hope of gain—if he goes to New York it will be a hand-to-mouth struggle for two years at least; she may not care for money—but she does not know what poverty is!—she is made for luxury—for beauty—ah, wait! another thought—what can he not do FOR HER with sixty million dollars?—for her—and for his old teacher, her father, his mother's friend, to whom he owes so much——

There is a knock at the door.

"Come in."

Eben entered, and was about to ask a question when John quickly spoke:

"Eben, I want to talk to you." John went back to his chair—and, turning, looked at Eben. Eben puckered his mouth for a whistle.

"Somethin's up. What is it?"

"Sit down." John spoke peremptorily.

Eben sidled to a chair and sat awkwardly on the edge.

"Eben, do you remember my mother's uncle, John Remington?"

"Do I remember him? You'd better believe I remember him. Didn't I have to get up at four *o'clock in* the mornin' to clean his boots? I didn't

usual get up till five, but yer Ma come to me an' says she to me, 'Eben,' says she, 'please do it for my sake,' says she. 'Uncle John's life is very deeferent from our'n an' I don't want him to be too uncomfortable here,' says she. When yer Ma looked at me like that with them eyes o' her'n I'd have just done anythin' she said: I swaller'd the pride of the natural man—an' cleaned his boots."

"He is dead."

" 'Bout time. He must have been near a hundred. He was a ripe old age in them days—an' that's 'most twenty years gone by."

"He is dead," John continued, "and he has left *sixty million dollars*——"

"Wal, he had to leave it—he couldn't take it with him—not a penny of it."

"He has left it—to—to my mother's son."

"Yer Ma's son? Speak plainer—do you mean *you?*"

"Yes."

Eben scratched his head.

"Wal, I'm glad I cleaned them boots!"

John jumped up and began pacing the room again. After a moment's silence, Eben said with a grunt of satisfaction:

"Now we can have a new horse for the ploughin'—we need it bad 'nuff."

"Why not a motor plough, Eben?" said John, smiling. "If we are playing at spending this Aladdin stuff, we might as well indulge ourselves with the best to be had."

" 'Tain't the best," grunted Eben; "there ain't no motor man ever made that can beat a horse the Lord made."

"See here, Eben, if the Lord made the man who made the motor why didn't the Lord make the motor?"

"Wal, you see——"

John snapped him short:

"Confound it! This is not the time to go wading in mental bogs nor to indulge ourselves in spending imaginary money. You can't have a motor—nor a horse—nor any blasted thing—we're paupers—paupers, worse luck! I can't even have a new suit nor a new necktie. We must go on living on a penny a day and running the farm on a dime a week—until I can make some money."

Eben was not at all disconcerted by John's assertion.

"Old Remington's money 'ud come easier. When do you get it?"

John tossed his head like a restive horse:

"Never!—don't you understand? I *don't intend* to take it—he attaches a condition to the bequest. He leaves me the money on condition that I never marry."

"Wal, I didn't know old Remington had so much common sense. I al'ays thought he was some'at of a fool—'cause he used them new-fangled jimcracks when he went afishin'."

John's look was a strange one.

"Sense! Do you call that sense?"

Eben nodded his head emphatically.

"Any man who gets married has 'trouble in the flesh'; we have the Bible's word for it."

John was tempted for a moment into self-betrayal.

"But any man who doesn't marry the woman he loves has trouble in the heart, and that's much worse."

"No, 'tain't!" said Eben stolidly. "That's nothin'! A man gets over heart-trouble quick 'nuff 'cause he's only got himself to fight, an' he can do his kickin' alone: but when a man's married, he's in double harness, an' if he kicks, the woman gets hurt."

"Eben, I believe that's true."

" 'Course it's true: ever know me to tell you a lie? Had you thought of marryin'?"

"That's an impertinent question! But, Eben, you are the very best friend I ever had: you carried me in your arms when I was a baby, you taught me everything I know about the woods and the streams! you have stood by me through my blue devils. I don't mind telling you the truth —I am in love."

Even as he said it he asked himself the question: "Am I in love?" Not as men may love! Not as John apprehended he *could* love—not as he knew that he was one day to love: he had been overswept by the compelling impulse of Spring, but what did he know of *love*—of love as he had

dreamed it, of the love of which the poets sing?

Eben regarded John with something of the look he used to give him long ago when he was a little boy.

"You are, are you? Wal, love's like the measles to a young 'un; you'll get over it."

"Sometimes," John added, "I think I should like to marry the woman I love."

Eben looked grim.

"That's a horse of another colour. It would be a sin ag'in Nature for a man to marry the woman he loves."

John stared in amused amazement.

"A sin to marry the woman *you love?*"

"Yes, when a man marries he had ought to take a woman as he buys a cow an' he had ought to run away from the woman he loves."

"What do you mean?"

Eben waited a moment and then replied as though it were a matter to which he had given much discriminating thought in the past:

"Don't you know them pretty butterflies with shiny wings—kind of gossamylike—they flutter an' flutter in the summer time: if you lie down an' look at 'em they most set you crazy wantin' to have 'em in yer hand, but if you catch one of 'em y're *sure* to break her wings, sooner or later, an' you wish you'd let her alone an' you may bet yer bottom dollar the butterfly wishes it too. Marryin' a woman you love is like that. 'Tis much better to go an' get a cow that gives milk than 'tis

to run after them gossamylike butterflies that bedazzle you."

Here was the homely putting of a practical truth.

"But I like butterflies and I hate cows!" John exclaimed impatiently.

" 'Tain't what you like nor what you hate—it's what's a square deal. The butterfly's all right if you'd let her be a butterfly but 'taint in nature —a man catches the butterfly an' when he gets her all right he expects her to be a cow an' give milk an' then her pretty wings gets broke."

"Perhaps you are right, Eben."

" 'Course I'm right. I al'ays am."

John still paced the floor—his hands deep-thrust in his pockets.

"I don't know whether this damnable bequest is a temptation—or a salvation."

"It's mighty hard to tell which is which, most generally—temptation or salvation."

Something drove John on to put the issue to the test of this primitive mind.

"Eben, do you advise me to take this money?"

"I'd never get in no such scrape as advisin' you nothin' any more. How many times have I advised you, an' how many times have you took it?"

"Well, what would you do if you had the question put to you?"

"Me? I couldn't have no sixty-million-dollar question put to me."

"But what would you do?"

"I'd say, 'No, thank ye, kindly'—money ain't nothin' but an idee——"

"Nothing but an idea?"

"That's all 'tis—it can't buy the things you really want most, it can't buy yer eyesight, it can't buy the rain, it can't buy the sun an' besides it's a heap o' trouble—more bother'n a wife."

"I don't intend to take it!" John spoke sharply.

"Wal, ain't that the livin' spit o' yer Pa—to ask advice for the sake of hearin' what folks say, when yer mind's made up!"

"Now go, Eben, and leave me alone. I want to think, I want to decide what to do."

"I thought you'd decided!"

"I have—but I want to think. Don't interrupt me again. I must be absolutely quiet. Don't come near me, no matter what happens, until the clock strikes ten."

Eben went out and John sat down; he felt as if he were a judge summing up a case: his fingers drummed nervously upon his desk, he alternately smiled as he recalled some things that Eben had said and frowned savagely as he went over the thoughts that Eben had interrupted. Suddenly he jumped up and went to an old chest of drawers in the corner: he pulled his key-ring out of his pocket and, opening the top drawer, took from it a small, worn leather case: he went to the lamp, unclasped the case and gazed upon the features of the miniature—it was the likeness of a young and lovely girl with a fine dark head, earnest eyes



and laughing lips. It was his mother in her early youth—the miniature was John's one great possession.

"I do owe *her* something," he said aloud; "to go back to the home of her fathers, to become a part of her family, and of her life! How glad she would be!"

She had always seen him in a larger place, as she phrased it. What a fulfilment of her dream if he should be the master of the old Remington house! His mother's love for his father had impressed even his childish mind, but he remembered that she held an abiding romantic devotion in her memory for her childhood's home. How strangely Fate wove the thread of life!

As that grim old Grimes had said—was it not his DUTY to think of her? John's native honesty suggested that this was sophistry—"Pure rot!" he phrased it to himself. Had his mother not left that very home to find home—left that very life to find life? He knew well that when she had talked to him of her prophetic vision of seeing him in a larger place than Elmcroft she had meant a place that he would win by brain and effort—a place that would be bright and proud with banners of his own accomplishment. Yes, it was sophistry! Did he drag his mother into the question because—because—in other words, was it a phase of temptation because he *wanted* the money? Pshaw! He could not bother tonight with hair-splitting ethics—his mind was



turning summersaults without sense or system—his thoughts were like a startled flock of wild birds flying here and there, hither and yon without order or method: he must follow these thoughts as they came—and now *his mother had come!* He could see himself on winter nights, long ago, by her side before the great log fire, listening to tales of her childhood in the old Remington house, which had held for him the charm of Aladdin's palace. It would be a joy to see that home—the house that he had dreamed of through all his imaginative boyhood.

A loud knock at the door! Eben opened it and thrust in his head. John instinctively laid his hand over the miniature—he could not for the life of him have told why he did this altogether foolish and inconsequent thing, for Eben and he had studied the miniature many, many times—Eben telling him points of loveliness which the miniature failed to catch, giving to John, in his rough and homely way, the clear picture of his mother as she had been when she came a young and laughing bride to the farm house, before she had known the strenuous life of poverty and the sorrow for lost children that had left the shadows in her eyes which John remembered.

"Say, Meester John," said Eben at the door, "if you *want* that money, don't pay no attention to what I said."

"Damn it! I *don't* want it!" said John savagely.

"Wal, if you *do* want it you'd better take it quick; 'cause money's like water—if it slips through yer fingers you can't pick it up again."

"I told you not to interrupt me. Go!"

Eben stood a moment, scratching his head.

"Say, Meester John, why don't you ask Mees Marion? She's as smart as a witch 'bout most things."

"Oh, go to the devil! I want to think!"

Eben withdrew his head and closed the door with emphasis, muttering to himself:

"When a man wants to think 'bout what to do 'bout the thing that he's decided to do—then——"

Eben did not finish the sentence.

When the clock struck ten with its wheezy stroke John was still sitting before his desk, the miniature still open before him: his mind still in chaotic confusion. He took up once more the letter from his dead uncle; hastily turning the pages he found these words: "If you have the wisdom to see the advantage of vast opportunity, large influence and great power you will accept the bequest." Vast opportunity—large influence—great power—he can have them all for the mere signing of a paper—without working for them—without all the dull preparatory grind! He folded the letter carefully, locked it in his drawer, put away the miniature and rose to go to the hotel. Instinctively he reached out his hand to turn down the lamp as he always did—an oil-saving habit that pov-

erty had made both necessary and habitual to him —then he drew back his hand without touching it.

"It can burn to blazes," he said aloud, tensely, "I won't stoop to such niggardly straits to-night! SIXTY MILLION DOLLARS!"

He ran down the steps, hurried out into the starlit night and walked rapidly to the hotel: as he walked his uncle's words moved in his brain to the rhythm of his steps—"Vast Opportunity, large Influence, great Power"!



CHAPTER V

THE flush of dawn is in the sky, the lambent morning star shines with a steady glow, the sun is heralded upon the hill, and all the apple orchard is tremulous with rosy light. The little birds are stirring in their nests; from bough to bough there is the answering "peep"—"peep."

Through the orchard comes Marion, dressed in immaculate white, the freshness of the morning on her face and the promise of the morning in her eyes. "Ah!" she said, clasping her hands, "was I unmaidenly yesterday to lift the veil before he had spoken? No! a thousand times, no! —he *had* spoken!—what are words?—they are only the sounds to echo what the heart has already said. It is insincere to pretend! It would have been affectation, petty pretence to ignore the *reality* of that moment—just because Eben interrupted the *mere words*. He loves me! He loves me! He had *begun* to tell me of his love—and I let him see my love before he spoke, because I wanted to reassure him—I wanted to break down his foolish, chivalric fears for me—fears of poverty and hardship!—that is what a girl should do —she should not withhold like a miser!—she should help a man to *see* the truth.

I love him and he loves me—that is the only truth! I understand—I *let* myself understand!—that is the emancipation that woman needs—the straightforward meeting of realities, without tiresome subterfuges—woman is always hiding her heart and she should be free to show it, free to be *herself,* when she is sure she can trust the man—and Oh! I can trust John—he is so splendid!—honour and truth are in his eyes!—I was *myself* yesterday: I have kept my own heart hidden so long—I have watched the brave, generous struggle between his love for me and what he felt was his *duty* to me! But he didn't know me as well as I know him. I wonder if any man ever does know any woman as well as the woman knows the man? I want him to know that I should rather beg from door to door with him than live in a king's palace without him." She gave a little low laugh. "He said I am made for a king's palace! I am made for love! O dear Sun, hurry! He will not be late to-day!"

Far off across the hill she saw John coming. Why did he move so slowly? As he neared the orchard the sun arose in all its majesty. A sweet shyness fell upon Marion's exalted mood—but the glory of the sunrise was in her eyes as she stood waiting. John came nearer—nearer—she could see his face!—her hands fell to her sides, her cheeks grew grey as burnt-out ashes: as he approached her there was a constrained air about

him, an awkwardness—if such a word could ever be applied to John: with conventional formality he lifted his hat, his voice was strained almost to the breaking-point, it sounded like the voice of a stranger, it was as though he were floundering for speech:

"Good morning, Marion. I knew you would be here—and so—and so—I came."

The pupils of Marion's eyes dilated: she seemed like a flower that had suddenly been blighted by frost.

"I said I would be here, John—at sunrise."

"Yes—I know you did——"

He was evidently embarrassed—and embarrassment was a thing that she had never seen in John before—not in all the years of their comradeship —"and I am glad it is so early because now we can talk undisturbed. Will you sit down, dear Friend—I want to talk with you—I have a great deal to say to you."

Marion sat dazed upon the grass.

"You and I have always been friends, Marion," John began: he waited for Marion to speak: she spoke no word. After a moment he continued: "What perfect friends we have been!—haven't we? There is no one of whom I am so fond as I am of you—I have been devoted to you since you were a baby"—Marion was absolutely silent—"but—but—I must leave you, my Friend. I must go away."

Still that awful silence from Marion: John with difficulty groped for words:

"I say, I must go away——"

Finally the echo of the sentence came back to him in metallic tones:

"You must go away?"

"I must go to New York——"

"You said yesterday you must go—to begin:" she spoke strangely.

"Yes, but this going is different—I must make great sacrifices."

"I don't understand."

"My uncle John, my mother's uncle—John Remington——"

What had seemed a straight road before he came, suddenly seemed a crooked one very difficult to traverse; John, usually so glib of tongue, so lightning quick of thought, found his tongue and his brain to all intents and purposes quite paralysed.

"Yes?"

"He is dead."

"Yes?" Marion repeated indifferently.

John felt a coward—an entirely new sensation for the fearless John—he wanted to run, but now that he had begun he had to finish.

"My uncle—my mother's uncle—left me his money—it is a great fortune—a very great fortune—he left it to me on condition that I—live a certain life—a life that he has planned for me——"

John found it more and more difficult to talk against the deathly silence that had fallen upon Marion.

"Last night I fought—I struggled—I was nearly crazy——"

Again the dull echo of his own words: "You fought—you struggled—you were nearly crazy——"

"I mean—Oh!—you know what I mean."

"Yes: I *think* I am *beginning* to know what you mean."

"I wanted to tell you—the very first of all——"

John felt a sudden loathing of himself: Marion's eyes had begun to blaze with that ominous blaze which John had known since childhood.

"And so—" he tried to continue.

Marion rose from the grass. "And so—you are going—going to inherit the property of your uncle John—your mother's uncle—John Remington."

In her tone there was a faint shade of mimicry of John's words a moment before, but she smiled her entrancing smile, shook out her skirt, gave it a little feminine smooth, and added in her light, most fascinating way:

"Thank you so much for telling me *first:* as you say, we have always been friends—*dear* friends! I am glad for your luck: now you will have the wider career that Father and I have always predicted for you. I hope you will be quite happy. Good-bye."

She turned to go and blew him a kiss from her finger-tips—such a kiss as she often blew to the little children who adored her.

"Marion—wait—listen—I want to talk it over with you—I have not said anything that I intended to say. I haven't yet told you the most important things of all."

Marion, with a steady hand, brushed back the hair that had blown across her forehead and looked at John with veiled eyes. Her tone was as though she were speaking of the most trivial and incidental thing imaginable.

"Not now, John. I am awfully sorry—but I haven't time. Matilda has been called away; I must take her place; I am the dairy maid this morning. I will tell you a secret, John—but you must not tell."

She came nearer to him and held up her finger with bewitching fascination—he caught the fragrance from her fair young body, he felt the lure of her charm.

"I will tell you a great secret because you are my friend—because—*we have always been friends!*—a dairy maid must skim the milk just as the sun rises: if she waits too long, mischievous fairies will turn the cream sour—think of that, John! think of turning cream sour! I will see you again to say good-bye."

Before he could speak, before he could reach out his hand to stay her, she tripped away with

her light, fleet step, singing in her clear, love-compelling voice a glad morning song:

"The rosy heralds of the sky
Have banished sombre night,
The sun in splendour mounts on high
To flood the world with light.

"The banners of the golden morn
Lead on—a magic way:
My happy heart goes forth, newborn,
To greet the glad new day!"

John stood as though he were an inanimate thing, looking after the graceful figure with her proud young head, high-lifted. He stood silent until her voice had died into the distance and then he said huskily:

"And I DARED to think she might love me!"

CHAPTER VI

An hour later Marion came back to the orchard: she walked with slow steps, all the colour had gone from her cheeks, even the shining of her hair was shadowed. It was scarcely six o'clock, no one was yet astir except the birds singing their morning song, and the little newborn insects flying in the sun and scurrying through the grass. Marion went to her favourite tree, sat down beneath its shade, clasped her hands and looked across the orchard: in her eyes was a smouldering fire. Since she had left John an hour before, she had been walking fast and furiously up and down the mountainside: she had gone like a wild thing, anywhere—anywhere—looking neither to the right nor to the left: she had shut all thought and all remembrance out of her mind, she only wanted to walk, walk, walk—run, run, run, through the trees and over the fresh grass, the stubble and the rocks: the exercise had brought no colour to her cheeks; she was deathly pale: but her fury had exhausted itself, she was like a wounded doe that had been running fast for shelter, and had dropped, at last, far spent.

"I must think!" she said tensely, "I must think [redacted] has happened to me: what am I to do? I

must find some way out! I will not, *I will not* let any man make a wreck of my life! I will pretend to myself that it is not true, that it has not happened!—I will pretend that no man *could* do such a dastardly thing to me—to *me,* Marion Meredith! He must never know that I know what I *do* know—he must never know that I understood what I did understand—I must pretend it was not so—pretend we have been only friends—*only* friends! that is the reason women pretend—because men are so—so——! Oh, it must not be possible—it must not be *conceivable* that any man could make me think that he wanted and intended to ask me to be his wife—his *wife*—Ah! dear God!—and then give me up—for MONEY!—No—no—it *is not true.*"

She drew a shuddering breath—she was silent a moment: then she clinched her hands, threw back her head, and spoke proudly: "There is *one* thing I can do—I *will* do—I can hide it—from Father—from the girls—from every one: no one shall *ever* see it—no one shall *ever* know it—my eyes shall never betray me—I will never cry—never—never!——"

Whereupon she swayed, threw herself forward on the grass upon her folded arms and cried as though her heart would break: great sobs shook her frame from head to foot. Tears and sobs were altogether a new thing to her.

Another hour passed, and still Marion Mere-

dith lay in her Gethsemane: and Nature did not heed Her child. The birds sang on as gayly as though the world were glad, the sunshine sparkled through the pink-white boughs as though every one in the world were happy, the little live insects of Spring crawled busily in the grass where Marion lay prone.

For ever after that hour Marion was a different and a stronger being.

A glad, blithe creature, she had turned to take her royal crown, and tragedy had touched her with an iron finger: she arose a woman who had received her sacrament—the baptism of woman's tears.

It was late, and her father was at breakfast when Marion entered the dining-room. His old and weary heart was moved at the new tenderness he felt in her caress: he did not analyse it—but he was conscious of it: that caress had a touch of the maternal in it; she was saying to herself:

"He is all alone in the world, without his wife —without any one but me! How careless I have been! I had forgotten that; I never thought, before, what it must be to be lonely."



CHAPTER VII

All Elmcroft was agog! The news spread with the rapidity of lightning: it was received with that intense personal interest which small communities feel for one of their members in dramatic moments.

The conditions of the will were as yet not known, but it was known that John had suddenly and astoundingly become the possessor of many millions. John, of course, avoided mentioning the conditions which limited the good that had come to him; and Marion, for reasons of her own, did not speak of it, even to her father. Eben was a steel trap; what was caught in his mind never came out.

When the will should be probated the facts would undoubtedly be known, for curiosity would ferret out every detail; but for the present, the main fact was sufficient: one of the Elmcroft boys had received a great fortune, and Elmcroft was pleased and proud—and treated him accordingly.

John did not have much time to enjoy the expressions of the generous good-will and genuine rejoicing that came to him, for he was very busy: he had to make numberless trips to New York and did an amount of writing and received an amount of mail that staggered the Elmcroft postmaster.

At the end of the month all his local affairs were settled: and he was packed, preparatory to leaving. He had not seen Marion to speak with her since the morning in the orchard. Whether this was by accident or by design on her part he could not be sure.

He knew that young Waller was dashing around in his motor car, taking the men and the girls for long rides and that Marion usually formed one of the party: for this he felt distinctly grateful; it soothed his conscience when that conscience troubled him: doubtless Marion did not in the least care for him; probably she never had, and his self-reproach for a subtle, imaginary wrong which he had done was wholly unnecessary; Marion had been but gracious to his May mood and responsive to the hour, as she always was: a quick sympathetic response to another's mood was one of Marion's chief charms.

John's mood of May madness was now lost in the exciting onrush of events, the thrill of stimulating anticipation and new adventure and the stirring of a momentary self-reproach was past.

The day came at last—the day for the break between his old life and his new life.

"Well, good-bye, Eben." John stood waiting for the trap, his suit-case locked and lying at his feet: Eben, ostentatiously busy with a rose vine —cutting off the faded roses with an exaggerated energy—was silent.

"Aren't you going to bid me good-bye?"



"Good-bye," Eben mumbled, string in mouth.

"Stop fussing, Eben! Give *me* these last moments!"

John went up to him and pulled him away from the rose vine with a dash of his imperious boyishness: as he did so he saw Eben's face.

"Eben! What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"I've got a touch of liver, I guess," Eben answered gruffly: "I didn't sleep none last night: I've been off my feed for a week."

John looked at him anxiously.

"You are ill; you look positively green: I won't go to-day."

"Oh, don't you bother 'bout me. I need a dose of calomel an' I'll be all right."

"Take good care of yourself, Eben: come to New York next week to see the house. Always *be sure* to let me know if there is anything you want. There comes the trap!"

Eben busied himself putting the suit-case into the trap and when John took his grimy hand to say a final good-bye Eben pointed to the view:

"Take yer last look at them hills."

Who would have credited the bluff old farmer with such diplomacy and finesse! While John was looking at the hills he could not look at Eben: therefore, he did not see the rough coat-sleeve pass over the eyes that were dimmed for one of the first times in history.

"Good-bye," John said affectionately.

"Good-bye, Meester John."



John jumped into the trap: as he started he shouted another affectionate farewell to Eben. When John was out of sight, Eben went into the barn, banged the door with emphasis and bolted it on the inside.

As John neared the picturesque Green which lay around the Station, he saw that it was bright with summer muslins, gay ribbons, red sweaters and party-coloured caps of golfers and of tennis players. All his young Elmcroft friends, with whom he had grown to manhood, were gathered to give him a send-off. His quick eyes searched the group.

Yes, there was Marion, looking like a bright June flower. She wore a crisp white embroidered muslin, touched with rosy ribbons, and a large picture hat with a wreath of moss rose-buds around the crown. He had never seen her look more lovely and, as the trap drove up, her radiant smile brought the bewitching dimple to her mouth.

John was aware that in the group was "that city fellow Waller:" he was not of the Elmcroft set, and had no common interests with the young men and maidens of the Village: he affected, however, as it were, a collateral interest with the party—this was significant.

There was much merriment and much talking and eager expressions of goodwill as John joined the group: the farewells and the good wishes were *hearty and sincere*: Billy Waller came forward



with polite interest: he was unusually cordial because of his delight in having John out of the running, and also because he saw John now in new perspective. At last came the word with Marion.

For a fleeting instant John winced, but Marion put out her hand with frank friendliness.

"Good-bye, John," she said in a tone that every one could hear. "To have good fortune come to *you* is the very nicest thing that ever happened in Elmcroft. Father and I always predicted it, you know."

"Thank you."

John lifted his hat. For one moment he looked into her eyes, but they were unbetraying.

"Father enjoyed your visit so much yesterday," she continued; "he was most enthusiastic about you when I returned: he said some really very nice things: I was motoring: I was so sorry to miss you."

Before he had time for more than another brief word of thanks the call came from the conductor and John, with the troop of gay youths and maidens at his heels shouting farewells, had just time to board the train. He stood on the platform as the train steamed away, and, looking back, his last picture was of Marion laughing and gazing up into the face of Billy Waller who had joined her, and was bending towards her with what John called, "that proprietary air which is such a wretched habit of the city men."

John was glad that he had had the opportunity to observe this species in the summer hotels: he would have a care what manners to avoid in his new life. Then he fell to thinking of the opulent future to which he was hastening.

Before he knew it, he was in New York—the home of his maternal ancestors. In the past, whenever he had been in New York, he had always felt himself a stranger, an alien: now as he entered the great City, he felt himself a part of its life: he felt that he had an inherited right and claim to its historic traditions and to its majesty. Thus quickly does the mind readjust itself to new conditions.

Heretofore, he had felt that he was a Wright, whose forebears had all been farmers: now he felt that he was a Remington whose forebears had helped to make the mighty City, with its wealth, its splendour, its progress and its hectic movement, its high tension and its electric forces. To his thought, heretofore, his mother had been a lovely flower that had been grafted accidentally upon the sturdy soil of the Wright family: now to his thought—as he entered her city—to take his place in her mother's home—his father had been the incident that had come into the life of his lovely mother. It was to her and to her family—the notable family of Remington—to whom he should trace his life and its traditions. The feeling which had flamed into sudden decision, as he *had walked* to the hotel for his final interview



with Mr. Grimes, found new justification with every hour. After all, was it not a family duty to take the money?

When he had been in New York a few weeks, with his flexible mind and volatile temperament, he knew that was his *home,* that, by right, he had always *belonged* there: and that his previous life had been an exile—merely a time of study and discipline to fit him for his rightful, his appointed place.

The millions that his uncle had left him were only a part of the inheritance into which he entered. In the swirling onrush of things new, demanding and exciting, he almost forgot Elmcroft, its life and its happenings.

But he was not forgotten by Elmcroft—news of him was the excitement for many days to come: his future, his career, his present life and past purposes were the discussion at many gatherings of men and maidens.

"Well, there is one thing that's as plain as a pike," said snapping black-eyed Hattie Burns—the gossip of Elmcroft—to her intimate friend, "and that is the affair between Marion Meredith and John Wright. Did you see their good-bye?"

"Yes, I saw it. Some people think she got left."

"Not much! As I say, it's as plain as plain that there is nothing in it: if she'd got left she'd have been terribly huffy—Marion has a peppery temper, you know—but she was perfectly lovely to him! They were just good friends, and there has

never been any love-making between them: I'm *certain sure* of that, now."

"Perhaps she refused him before he got rich."

"Not on your life! Men don't ask girls they've known always to marry them: men like new things —*especially* John Wright; he always was daft about anything new."

"John used to look at Marion as if he loved her."

"Rubbish! He looked exactly the same way at everything lovely—and Marion's awfully pretty, you know!—John's crazy about pretty things—I have seen him look at the old sunset heaps and heaps of times with that same look on his face, and he wasn't in love with the sunset!—and when that fool lecturer was here, last year, he looked at him just the same when he read that poetry stuff I couldn't understand a word of. And I have seen John look like that—just the way he looked at Marion—often and often when he was reading a book all by himself."

"I think John Wright was awfully nice, don't you?"

"You bet he was—we shall miss him a lot."

"He was always so polite. Say, we are talking about him just as if he were dead."

"Well, he is dead to us," Hattie sighed.

"Don't you think he'll ever come back?"

"What will he want to come back to this dull place for? They say his house is most as big as

the church and that he eats off gold and silver and drinks out of crystal goblets."

"Mercy! I have eaten with him lots of times off of tin and drunk water out of his cap. Do you remember at picnics how he used to put fresh leaves in his cap before he would let us drink?"

"Yes, wasn't it funny—and nice?"

"He was awfully neat and particular about things: say, he's terribly clever: Marion says the thing that she's sorry about is that he will stop reading and studying now."

"Why should he stop reading and studying?"

"He won't have time: he will have to take care of his money."

"Think of having so much money that you have to *take care of it:* isn't it funny? We have to take care because we *haven't* got it."

"So do we."

"John was always awfully nice, but don't you think he was a little queer?" added Hattie, after a pause.

"If you mean by 'queer' different from other men, I should say he was."

CHAPTER VIII

More than two years have passed since the day that John steamed away from the little Station of Elmcroft.

It had been a wonderful time for John, exciting, exhilarating, full of feverish pleasure; even his flexible mind had had to sharpen its agility to keep pace with the new impressions, new experiences and new adjustments, the opening out of a life, before unknown to him, the unfolding of a new order of existence, which, hitherto, he had seen only in books: the time had passed so swiftly and confusedly that he had had a sense of having to draw quick breaths to keep pace with the onrush of events.

His old familiar self had not had a moment in which to assert itself. He had a dim and curious feeling of having left that self in the little Village of Elmcroft—a feeling that he had brought only his senses and his mind to New York: but those he undoubtedly had brought and they had been so excitedly busy, so fascinatingly diverted, so constantly amused and interested, that he had not had time to miss his familiar spirit. His senses had had satisfactions of which he had never dreamed in his luxury-denied life: his mind

had had avenues opened to it faster than it could travel them: the exhilaration of handling large affairs, the sensuous delight of his staggering fortune, the delirium of being able to do what he wanted to do—to give what he wanted to give—to buy what he wanted to buy: the keen joy in pictures and in sumptuous books, the indulgence in music, and even the pleasure in physical comforts had stimulated his impressionable nature: the men he met had opened new worlds of thought to him: the beautiful women—with their bright wit, their conscious air of having known everything from the beginning—had intoxicated his senses. The two years had been a swift succession of new impressions: a vigorous effort at new adjustments, and eager experimenting in large opportunity. Now, at last, he had become fully established in his new life and place.

He had been a marked success from the start. His looks and his bearing were a greater asset than his millions; but his millions had given him the opportunity to make a background to his personality and had enabled him to express the result of his years of self-culture in his own spontaneous way. He knew enough of the world by reading and by tradition to make no fatal social mistakes, no jarring experiments, but he knew so little of the world by experience that there was an original and daring method in his self-expression which gave him a peculiar charm: there was a certain straightforward frankness about him

which protected him from the result of his ignorance of the world: no one was tempted to set traps to discomfit him: it was the impulse of the men and women he met to give him the benefit of every help, both direct and indirect, to aid him on his way to what they considered must be the high goal of his desire. With his quick adaptability and keen cleverness, he soon learned the manner, the forms, the tricks of society and the world, and developed the latent social power which was an inheritance from his mother—who had been one of the best-born and most popular girls in New York. He had a distinguished air—but he had no airs, and the difference between an *air* and *airs* is the difference between ozone and the malarial atmosphere of the bogs.

What was his goal? Naturally, the men and women about him imagined it to be the desire to become a finished product of the elect, a leader in the smart world of fashion, and they helped him to that end. John had no such definite desire: he did not yet know what ultimate he did desire: his mind had not as yet outlined any plan, he had not seen beyond the absorbing interest of new conditions and new environments: his old desires had all been intellectual—ambitions of mental growth and mental achievement: his desire for fortune had been but a desire for fuller opportunity: and he had not as yet readjusted his scheme, his dream of life, nor formulated his new goal; it would have been impossible in so short a time, with distrac-

tions of every kind interrupting him and pressing upon him from every quarter. He was still going with the tide and he fitted himself with his characteristic pliant readiness to the swift current on which he was borne: he had the natural adaptability to do this in the most effective way: he brought the same intellect which he had brought to bear upon intellectual matters to bear upon social questions.

He did not know how to dress as became his position—but he *knew* that he did not know, and that was the next best thing. He consulted his old college friend, Ted Remsen, with frank questions as to the best tailor in New York: then he went to that tailor and put himself in his hands, ordering so lavishly that the tailor thought it well worth his while to produce the best results possible. Soon John Remington Wright was one of the best dressed men in New York: and his native freedom of motion, which came from life in the open, gave the finishing quality to his well-cut clothes, taking from them the turn of the smart tailor shop, which so often clings to the clothes of men, and subordinating them to his own personality. He was clever enough to keep his simplicity of manner, after he had mastered the technique of the social code and learned the conduct of the new world: thus he struck a new note in the sophisticated atmosphere around him: but there was a certain masculine strength about him—both physical and mental—which gave this



simplicity a virile quality. He was unspoiled, it is true, but this does not mean that he was unconscious: he knew, with intuitive worldly wisdom, that his naturalness and lack of affectation were an added asset—the asset of originality which makes success.

With this simplicity he had, also, an intellectual fastidiousness in art, in taste and in breeding. Music and art had long been to him delights: between the covers of the books he read he knew the best, theoretically, and in this hour of opportunity he surrounded himself with only the best—the best music and the best art. He had a slight air of the foreigner—which gave him great charm for those who met him: this simply means that, to the trained eye, he seemed a little new to his surroundings: one was conscious that he had had other advantages than the restricted limitations of New York: back of his life—as he was living it now—were apparently hours of leisure and culture, which had stamped indelibly their impress on his mind and on his manner: whether those hours of leisure and culture had been in some old-world capitol or in the world of books, in some ancient city or in the leisure of the free and open country, did not so much matter—the result of it was there: he readily, even eagerly, adapted himself to the current on which he was borne, but, in the background, there was a flavour, a haunting flavour, of something larger and fuller than that current. He was elected to the most exclusive

clubs and he met the men in a frank, straightforward way which won their respect, and made them unconsciously feel that a fresh breeze had blown into the stuffy club rooms: they all liked him: he had an instinctive sense of fitness which kept him from making any false step.

John enjoyed his new life with keen zest and spontaneous abandon: it was a refreshment to be free from the hampering toil of daily grind and the worry of petty problems—as to how to make ends meet, the forthcoming of the interest-money, and the nervous watching of the crops and the farm products upon which that interest-money depended. It was a riot of pleasure to gratify his fastidious taste and his starved artistic sense.

For two years he took no initiative—he made no move: then he spent three months in Europe to complete his equipment as he had planned it: he could not stay longer, because he was bound by the will to attend personally to the estate: he had to hasten back to his tasks and work extra hours to make up for his vacation: for the first time he found his duties irksome.

When he returned from Europe he had made over the old Remington house somewhat to his taste. Of course, to have satisfied his architectural ideal he would have gone uptown and built a new house after his own concept of what a house should be, but there was something intensely gratifying to his quickly developing social sense in living in the house that had been in his

family for generations: his versatile mind and his pliant temperament already had accepted the thought that he was really a Remington.

When the old house had been remodelled and refurnished to his fancy he had an established sense of home. Now he could stop and draw his breath: he could strike his chord in the social world—and he struck it with no uncertain hand.

Through the past months there had often been undercurrents of remembrance and sharp flashes of recollection: sometimes there had been moments of self-reproach about Marion: but for any shade of self-reproach the argument was always ready to the contention of his conscience.

After all it was evident that there had been no reason for fear nor for discomfiture in that May episode: Marion did not care—it was entirely evident she did not care—she had not even understood his feeling: it was only the woman in her which had vibrated to his mood that evening in the orchard: and his confusion and embarrassment, when he thought that he had hurt her, had been altogether an exaggeration born of his chivalry, and the sensitiveness of his inner consciousness—being so near to mystic things.

How coolly and indifferently she had laughingly left him that morning at sunrise when his whole being was shaken with chivalrous shame at the fear of having offended her—and how coldly indifferent she had been to his going away, motoring

with that Waller man all the last days of his stay in Elmcroft!

If, on that fateful night—when he had his tussle with himself about accepting his fortune—there had come to him a suggestion of *her surrender* it had been quickly contradicted: if he had ever had any doubt whatsoever of the state of her heart toward him, her cool, casual and indifferent farewell had convinced him that her sentiment for him had been but the aftermath of childhood—the romance but a fairy tale.

At least for the sake of their long comradeship and friendship she might have found a few brief minutes to talk with him before he left Elmcroft, to go over his plans with him and look with him through new vistas opening before him. Thus his thoughts born of the injustice of egotism and the blindness of selfishness met his occasional twinges of conscience.

And he had fresh evidences to prove that there was cause for complaint on his part. He wrote several letters to Marion, which were models of construction and discretion, dwelling upon old days and old ways: they were charming and clever letters diplomatically emphasising their friendship: but although her answers were courteous to the point of precision, they were brief and unresponsive, making John so uncomfortable that his letters grew less and less frequent: finally they stopped entirely; and as it was his habit to turn his back upon unpleasant sensations when he

could, all communication with the Parsonage soon ceased, with the exception of magnificent presents that were occasionally sent to Dr. Meredith: these presents were always so formally and coldly acknowledged, that if John had not known Marion's character so well he would have thought she had told her father the story of his behaviour: but though old Dr. Meredith might be ignorant of facts and circumstances, he needed no telling when his daughter had been hurt.

As time went on the memory of Marion receded more and more into the background of John's thoughts.

His hours were full, his life was superficially dramatic, his imagination was excited: he had become the fashion of the hour.

When the old substantial Remington house had been readjusted to his liking, he began a series of entertainments: these entertainments were exclusive, which added to their vogue: he did not try to be clever in this particular: he was not calculatingly shrewd, neither was he in the least snobbish; it was a mere indulgence of a marked phase of his temperament: to that temperament, combined as it was of many different elements, *selection* had always been natural, in whatever sphere he happened to be moving at the time: even as a little boy, when he gathered shells or pebbles, he would always pick out those which he considered the smoothest and prettiest of their kind and would play only with those.

With his books, it was the same: he selected the best for his own special books, and read them over and over: and when his life began to move in channels of the social world, he instinctively selected the smartest, the most attractive, the most finished products of their class. There was no deliberation in this, it came from a habit of mind. He, who two years ago, knew nothing of the smart world in which he now moved, was, perhaps unconsciously, very exclusive in that world and by a curious, well-established social law, the more exclusive he was the more sought for he became. He was everywhere a most welcome guest; invitations to his house were eagerly desired, deeply prized, and not a little coveted.

He was no more lacking in loyalty and the finer shades of generosity, that his Elmcroft friends had no part in his new life, than a swan, which has at last found the water, is to be blamed if it dips and swims and forgets the barnyard fowls that made its little world when it was hemmed in the coop. Although John had always been courteous and gracious to those about him, he had little in common with them: he had always felt a smothered impatience at the life of the Village. Dr. Meredith and Marion had been the only outlets and satisfaction of those Elmcroft days: these two were the only ones whom he had really cared to see in Elmcroft, and now it was these two whom he desired *not* to see: they would have been the only ones who could have tempted him to visit his

old home, and now the thought of smiling, indifferent Marion—so changed from old times—and her austere father, looking at him with penetrating eyes, was intolerable.

No request nor appeal ever came in vain from any one who had thought himself John's friend in the past—but—*go* to Elmcroft? "Not on your life!" John said to himself with indrawn breath, half ashamed of his resolve and half glad that he had the good sense to adhere to his wise determination.



CHAPTER IX

One evening, John was giving one of his delightful and exclusive dinners. If the shade of old John Remington had returned to the drawing-room of his one-time dwelling, that stately room would have amazed the ghost: not that it had been robbed of all evidence of the previous existence of old John Remington—something in John's loyalty forbade this; to the memory of the uncle, to whom he owed his new life, he paid habitual respect which refused to ignore the landmarks of that uncle's life, even where they were most inartistic and unsightly. But, although the room in the ancestral home was fundamentally as old John Remington had altered it, fifty years ago, bearing many hideous marks of the ugly early-Victorian construction, yet it was as if a gnarled and ancient tree had suddenly blossomed into beauty and bloom. The room was fragrant with flowers growing in costly silver jars and standing in stately gold and silver vases, splendid with notable pictures and luxurious with numberless articles of elegance: here, there, and everywhere, were books; John's passion for books had indulged itself to the full; the old library, on the other side of the hall, was filled with a fine and rare collec-

tion; John's own den—on the floor above—was crowded with his old books and with the newest books of the day: even in the drawing-room, there were sumptuous volumes, superbly bound, lying on every table.

But if the shade of old John Remington should have returned that evening, there would have been scant time to consider alterations in the room. His ghostly attention would have been challenged by the array of beauty and of fashion in the women who dominated it!—fair heads and dark heads, white shoulders and rounded arms, diamonds, rubies and sapphires, blazing tiaras and nodding aigrettes, soft voices and feminine laughter, would have made the ghost of old John Remington hurry back to the shades from whence it had come.

Twelve women were waiting for the twelve men in the smoking-room; meanwhile they were consoling themselves with coffee, liqueur and cigarettes: they had drifted into two groups: one group in a far corner was discussing, in low tones, a subject—perhaps a scandal—of common interest: the other group, around the fire, was the more noticeable of the two; that group challenged attention: five of the most popular women in New York had drawn together, as by mutual attraction; five women, and with them a young girl, a favourite with both groups, who had chosen the sparkling circle by the fire as being the more

amusing. The women in that circle were distinguished each in some special way.

Mrs. Barkley was a beauty, a petted favourite since babyhood: her dark brown eyes and coal-black hair, her brilliant colouring, her gowns, her original jewels, and a certain dash of daring were the delight of men, the envy and despair of women: her fascination and her lively grace made her the desire of hosts and hostesses who wanted enlivened dinner parties.

Mrs. Morgan was chic from the tip of her diamond-touched aigrette to her blue satin, high-heeled, diamond-buckled slippers; she was an arbiter of fashion and of all social ritual: she was sadly lacking in natural wit, but she had a good, a well-trained memory, and she kept a storehouse of inimitable stories always at her tongue's end: if she had no clever contributions of her own to make, she had a fund of amusing things that she had treasured to pass on: and thereby she added greatly to the gaiety of the hour.

Mrs. de Lancey—a handsome widow with a fortune that enabled her to follow her whims and the flight of whatever fancy she chose, had a house, an entourage and a position which made her the desideratum for the social aspirant and those on pleasure bent.

The stately Mrs. Gore—an Englishwoman by descent—was a much sought-for person; her own and her husband's aristocratic connections, and her many titled friends abroad, gave her a social



prestige, especially to those vapid Americans touched with the obnoxious toxine of title-mania.

Then—there was Mrs. Winthrop!

Mrs. Winthrop should not, could not be classified; she defied classification: in what category could one place her? She was also beautiful, but with a strange beauty very different from Mrs. Barkley's frank loveliness: her eyes had the glint of blue-green aquamarine; they had full languid lids, white and blue-veined with long lashes; suddenly and unexpectedly those eyes would open upon one in a startling way, and just as one was thinking that there was something in them that one was not quite sure about, the heavy lids fell to cover them, and one was haunted by the absorbing desire to see them once again. She had a sharp tongue, which she kept sheathed—as she kept her eyes veiled—until she wished to draw the sword; then her sharp cuts were given with gentle sweetness. Her ancestors were French: one sometimes wondered just what that ancestry was: but as she was Horace Winthrop's wife it really mattered very little. She assumed the authority of the Faubourg St. Germain: whether or not it had been hers by birth, it was hers by right of conquest: she had conquered it during the diplomatic services of Horace Winthrop, which had been a socially brilliant event in the annals of the American embassy. It is constantly asserted that the Faubourg St. Germain is not to be conquered by *any one* who comes in by other ways than by the

broad portals emblazoned with ancient escutcheons; but whatever may be said to the contrary, notwithstanding, every tradition bends its head to a beautiful and diplomatically clever woman, especially if that woman is from America. Winthrop's prestige and Winthrop's wealth gave his wife strong forces with which to work. The Ambassadorship had been given him at the request of his father, who had done much for the Republican Party in many ways.

Although she still kept the flavour of Paris, a certain *je ne sais quoi,* in her atmosphere, even as she kept it in her dress, Mrs. Winthrop was too clever and too cosmopolitan to assert her nationality: as a French woman she knew she would be an interloper in the Parisian quarters she essayed; as an American she was a welcome guest: therefore, she was shrewd enough always to proclaim herself an American—even though she kept a Parisian heart. Her husband was a handsome, languid, indifferent man, lazily busy always with his buzzing nothings—much sought after at the clubs where he spent most of his time: he was not in the least brilliant, and, if the truth be told, he was yawn-compelling: but Ameda Winthrop hid her yawns with inimitable grace; she was always distinctly grateful for any man who came her way to banish them, and she was grateful to Horace for the free head he gave her in these matters and the free hand in the open purse—to which the strings were seldom drawn.

On this evening, Mrs. Winthrop was more charming than ever; there was a subtle air of mystery about her, which all the women noticed: she sipped her coffee from an old French coffee cup as fragile as frost.

"I am very proud of my pupil," she said nonchalantly, smiling and looking about the sumptuous room.

"Your pupil? Do you mean John Wright?" Mrs. Barkley lifted her dark eyebrows.

"Yes; Horace met him at the Club last year—and brought him to me: he was a stranger to New York—but I knew the moment I met him that he was a *find*—and so I took him in hand."

Mrs. Barkley made a little *moue*—

"But I assure you, my dear, my claim is the earlier one; he was Ted's classmate at Harvard; and the moment he came to New York, *two* years ago, Ted brought him to me—on College terms, so to speak."

Mrs. Winthrop flashed a look at her; perhaps there was a slight hostility in her blue-green eyes—if there were, the heavy lids fell quickly and covered them before one could be quite sure; her voice was musical:

"Are you on College terms now, so to speak?"

"Precisely," answered Mrs. Barkley lightly.

"Multimillionaires are always a find, are they not?" said Mrs. Gore, as she lighted her cigarette.

"Not in the least." Mrs. Winthrop spoke with an air of one having authority. "They are a



drug in the market—they have become so common that they have lost all distinction; now it is rather distinguished to be poor."

Mrs. Barkley gave a little cry:

"Jubilate! We are fast on the road to distinction, then; Robert lost thousands and thousands in the last slump in the market."

"But," continued Mrs. Winthrop, "if one happens to have *It*, then the millions give a snap to the situation. Millions permit personal expression: so *our* pupil,"—and she smiled sweetly at Mrs. Barkley—"being what he is, had the wherewithal to fast become what he was not: he is as clever as lightning and as swift as the wind."

"You are right, Mrs. Winthrop! Mr. Wright is dangerously clever," said Mrs. de Lancey. "It actually stops my breath the way he takes his fences! He knew nothing of the world two years ago, and now look at this dinner! It was perfectly appointed—there was not a flaw from start to finish. It takes some women, even, a life-time to learn *shadings*."

"Everything was absolutely as it should be." Mrs. Morgan spoke with the final air of a connoisseur.

"And so are the rooms." Mrs. de Lancey glanced at the shaded lamps. "Bachelors usually insist upon a blazing glare of light, fatal to all *nuances*—and worse than fatal to all complexions."

Mrs. Barkley made a graceful gesture of protest:

"I wish it were only bachelors, Florence, but husbands, alas! are the same: they will *never* learn: Robert has a perfect mania for switching on the electric light in the most critical and romantic moments of life. It is too maddening when you are sitting in 'the soft shade of lamps, to be wooed for a while' by some attractive man —to have your artistically shadowed room suddenly turned into the Great White Way! It is truly tragic!"—and she gave a little shrug.

"Perhaps Mr. Barkley has reasons of his own." Mrs. Winthrop spoke softly.

"Reasons? What reasons?" Mrs. Barkley turned her lovely dark head quickly, like a bird.

"To end the wooing, my dear."

"How clever of you, Ameda! I never thought of that!" said Mrs. Barkley coolly: she took a cigarette, and as she gracefully lighted it she looked around the group from one to another with her indescribable charm of manner.

"Whom do you think I was flirting with madly the last time that Robert spoiled the atmosphere by his vivid search-light?"

"Do tell us." The women were alert.

"He is the most fascinating man in the world: I would go with him to the ends of the earth—yes,"—she gave a dramatic shudder—"I have decided—for I have *often* debated the question—I would *even* leave the children for him."

Mrs. Winthrop and Mrs. Gore exchanged glances.

"May we presume to ask his name?" said Mrs. Gore.

"Surely"—Grace Barkley flashed—"it is Robert Barkley!"

They all laughed except Mrs. Winthrop, who "often found it most difficult," she said, "to find any point to Mrs. Barkley's nonsense."

"Mr. Wright's clothes are perfect." Mrs. Morgan went back to John—she was a woman given to persistency in details.

"Money is the best tailor!" observed Mrs. Gore.

"Oh, do you think so, Mrs. Gore?" Mrs. Winthrop's tones would imply that her contradiction was an agreement. "I have always thought that money—by itself—is the worst tailor a man can find: rich men, without breeding or brains, in good clothes are the most fearful fakes; the threadbare sack suit of a gentleman looks royal beside the smooth, new, sleek, evening-clothes of a millionaire manufacturer."

"The best thing about Mr. Wright is that he doesn't need any clothes." This came from the young girl, the only unmarried one of the party, who had sat in silence, looking from one to the other of the women as they talked: she was exceedingly pretty, with a frank, straightforward Diana-like look; her direct uncompromising gaze

made one a trifle uncomfortable if there were anything to conceal.

Mrs. Winthrop turned her surprised eyes upon the girl.

"What an improper remark, Sally. Have you been reading Carpenter?"

"Who is Carpenter?" said Sally, nothing daunted.

"He is one of the most cosmic of moderns."

Sally pouted: "Oh, bother! When one doesn't know how to describe a person, one says he is cosmic."

Mrs. Winthrop smiled indulgently.

"Sally, for a dunce, you make extremely penetrating remarks."

"I know what she means," Sally said with spirit, looking around the group. "She asked me, last week, to go with her to one of the Wednesday morning lectures—it was on the prehistoric psychic phenomena of the subconscious cerebellum of the cranium—or some such lucid subject—and I told her that I was a *dunce* and that I should be bored stiff!"

Mrs. Barkley looked at the girl affectionately.

"You are so pretty, Sally, that you really do not need any brains."

"Thanks awfully, Mrs. Barkley. Is that a compliment or an insult?"

"My dear child, do you think any one would take the trouble to insult a little pink-and-white thing like you?"

"Well, I never could understand," continued Sally, "why women should take their learning as though it were a Turkish bath and have to have it lathered over them, and rubbed into them by experts: it is an awful nuisance—I much prefer to dance."

Sally jumped up and took some graceful dancing steps which she had been practising in the afternoon.

"Sit down, Sally!" said Mrs. Morgan. "You make me nervous. I'm afraid you'll upset that table."

Sally turned on her with mock indignation and reproach.

"*Mrs. Morgan! I* upset a table! I may not understand your *isms* and your *ologies*—but I know how to dance without breaking the furniture."

Sally curbed her spirits, however, and came back to her low chair; she clasped her hands before her and sat looking into the fire with the air of a young sage as she spoke:

"I am a dunce, as you say—but if I *did* have brains I should enjoy the wild delight of letting them soar of their own free will—I shouldn't want some one to give me a chart to steer them by, or to take my mind by the hand to lead it gently through a maze of material hurled at me without order or system."

"But, Sally," Mrs. Morgan was nothing if not literal, "you surely do not object to a teacher?"

"Certainly I do not object to a teacher—but I, the *dunce,* need a very different teacher from you —the intellectual! If one is to study at all, one wants to study in a *real* way. I've been to the Colony Club when you have your lectures there and the lectures are like certain cocktails—made up of so many things that one can't tell what one is drinking; they are stimulating but not strengthening; after drinking them one is dizzy but not fortified."

"I think, myself," sighed Mrs. Barkley, "the child is right: it is somewhat confusing: Saturday night, by the merest chance, Robert and I were alone for dinner—fancy being alone with one's husband—alone in one's own house for dinner!—after dinner I was trying to amuse Robert —one must be entertaining even to one's husband, if one is cast alone with him on a desert evening —Robert has no end of brains—I always try to live up to him—amongst other things, I attempted to give him a résumé of my intellectual month—we had a perfect orgy of lectures last month, you know—so I began; but to tell you the truth, my dears, I became hopelessly mixed! I found myself making a rabid Socialist of that Indian poet —what's his name?—Oh, I know—Tagore—and talking about Karl Marx as though he were a poet, in a way that would have made that drastic old dear sit up: I found my political and my domestic economy changing terms; and I sent the leader *of the militant* movement roaming around Lon-



don, as 'The Widow in the Bye Street:' the first thing I knew I was waking up from a lovely dewy nap—and Robert was leaning over me, and laughing at me."

"There it is!" said Sally: "I go to the Colony Club sometimes on lecture days, and I sit and watch the women come in, just for fun: I laugh in my sleeve—these new sleeves give more leeway for laughter—they all try to look so awfully wise, so eager and so intelligent, and yet I *know* they are bored stiff, their poor little minds are all in a hodge-podge mix-up: if they *really* cared for what they came for, they wouldn't come!"

"That sounds a bit off, Sally," said one of the women.

"Not at all!" answered Sally: "If they cared for what they came for, they would go to the library and *dig*. But did you ever see one of those smart intellectuals stealing off to study in dusty, musty alcoves of the library, or going to Teacher's College for a serious consideration of the subject she affects? Not on your life!"

Mrs. de Lancey looked about the room:

"What a stunning room this is! Mr. Wright has excellent taste."

"Excellent!" assented Mrs. Gore: "Is it really true, Mrs. Barkley, that he was the son of a farmer?"

"Yes; his mother was a Remington; my mother used to tell me of her: she was very beautiful and popular: but to every one's surprise she mar-

ried a common farmer, much to the distress of the family."

"Amazing! How did it happen?"

"Her mother, John's grandmother, old Mrs. Atkinson, was an invalid. My mother said she was a most stately dame: I fancy she must have been about as progressive as a blind mole in a hole. One summer she was ordered to a primitive out-of-the-way place called Elmcroft, because her doctor had a fad about the air there. It has grown to be more or less of a summer resort now, but at that time it was a wild primitive place with unbroken pine forests. She took her daughter Mary with her and the girl wandered through the woods free and untrammelled for the very first time in her life. The women of that generation had no safety valves—no thrilling outlets whatever such as we have: they were kept in nice little glass cases and their mothers used even to pump the air out of the glass cases lest life should be too exciting for them. How little mothers know! How absurd the whole method is! In New York, Mary Atkinson was not allowed to move without an attendant, but in the forests of Elmcroft of course she was safe, her mother thought—and yet—there lurked the danger of dangers! One day whilst Mary was winging her way through the pine forest she met with some kind of an accident—tripped over a fallen tree or something of that kind—and 'along came a farmer whose name was' [redacted]*Wright and* helped her out of her difficulty. He



was very handsome and strong: she was very beautiful and weak: he and she looked into each other's eyes and the lightning struck. After that fateful day, Mary did not walk alone.

"Mary Atkinson was far ahead of her times: I think she must have been a well-spring of delight in her day and generation!—but her mother —and my mother—thought she was quite deplorable and improper. To her mother's surprise she asserted that she would stay for ever in Elmcroft —she preferred Paradise and Adam to New York and the sons of men. Old Mrs. Atkinson was frantic, the Remingtons—especially old John—were furious: but with true Remington force of character Mary stood her ground. She said that she was of age and was entitled to choose her own life—that she had never really lived until that summer: she protested that New York was stagnation and that Paradise was exhilaration: and, lo and behold—John Wright was the exciting product of that exhilaration!"

"Grace," protested Mrs. Morgan, "what an *extraordinary* way you have of putting things!"

"Then, Mr. Wright is truly——" began Mrs. Gore.

"He is truly," interrupted Mrs. de Lancey, "one of the most distinguished men in New York."

"It all depends, as Mrs. Winthrop said"—and Mrs. Barkley inclined her lovely head in Mrs. Winthrop's direction—"on whether or not a man

has *It.* Mr. Squeedunk of Squeedunkville is a blacksmith, he may inherit millions—but he is a blacksmith to the end of time: whereas, Siegfried—to all intents and purposes—was a blacksmith—and yet——"

"That's who it is!—that's who it is!" exclaimed Sally galvanically.

"Do be quiet, Sally."

"That's who what is?" asked Mrs. Winthrop, smiling subtly.

"Mr. Wright!—I've wondered and wondered whom he was like—now I know!—Siegfried in clothes."

"How absurd!" Mrs. Winthrop demurred.

"Isn't it true?"

"You incorrigible one."

Mrs. Winthrop, who had often thought the same when she saw the opera, was too clever to betray herself; she changed the subject by turning to Mrs. Barkley:

"What a ravishing gown, Grace!"

Mrs. Barkley smiled her thanks.

"It is very simple."

"*Simple?*" said Mrs. Morgan, who could always estimate values at a glance.

"Very simple," repeated Mrs. Barkley. "It is nothing but a slit, two straps and a yard or two of chiffon: the present mode consists chiefly of negations and suggestions."

"Look at that exquisite embroidery! Surely *that is not a negation.*"



"That," asserted Mrs. Barkley airily, "is a mere fallacious gossamer web over nothingness—according to Robert."

"Grace!"

"When Robert was deriding the gown, I pointed out the quality of the embroidery and he said: 'The embroidery is all right, but where is the foundation? I thought things had to be embroidered *on* something.' It quite worried me; I feared perhaps the gown was too daring."

"Not at all!" the women exclaimed in chorus.

"Your dressmaker is certainly an artist," said Mrs. de Lancey.

"I think she is," agreed Mrs. Barkley. "She is a Cubist—her gowns are abstractions. Isn't the present mode utterly absurd? A few years ago when one's new gown came home every one knew it, even the chef—the box blocked the way—now it might be any little unconsidered trifle. This gown was sent in a box about so large"—she illustrated the size with her hands—"and Perkins left it on the hall table: he thinks my things belong in Fifine's department, so he never carries them up-stairs on his own initiative—I constantly have to remind him that it is his duty to carry up all parcels. Patiently I go over the matter each time and tell him that Fifine's responsibility does not begin until she has my things in hand, but Perkins' brain always stands as pat as a Republican—he refuses to take in new ideas. There are very un-

diplomatic interchanges between him and Fifine regarding the mere matter of transportation. For some strange reason there is always war between those two, or at best a belligerent peace. I know this, although, before me, they are like cooing doves. As I say, this box was left lying on the hall table for Fifine, and M'Conner, Robert's valet, passing through the hall, saw it and thought it was a box of ties that Robert had ordered, so he took it up to Robert's dressing-room:—fancy what we have come to wearing!—I mean the size of our gowns!—M'Conner is a fool—a willing pleasant fool, but a hopeless one—I was sitting in my room, deep in a novel, and M'Conner appeared with the box in his hand, he had put on the cover so that I did not see what was in the box—he had such a confused face and manner I thought something awful had happened: he hemmed and hawed and then he said hesitatingly: 'These ties, Ma'am, ain't ties, Ma'am.' I asked him what in Heaven's name he was talking about and he answered: 'Mr. Barkley's ties, Ma'am, is your dress, Ma'am."

"Grace," exclaimed Mrs. de Lancey, "you made up that story—every word!"

"Not at all—there is much more, but I shall omit the important and spicy part—namely, what Robert said when he heard the story."

"What was it?"

"Nothing would induce me to tell. I am glad to say," and Mrs. Barkley gave a little sigh of



relief, "the fashion is changing. Soon one's maid will be able to keep track of one's gowns without the aid of a magnifying glass: but it will be difficult if one lives in an ordinary sized house as I do, because the boxes will not get in at an ordinary front door."

"Do you really think that we shall have hoops?" asked Mrs. Gore.

"Certainly—or their equivalent," answered Mrs. Barkley. "We scoff at Fashion, but the law of Fashion is an intellectual thing: it is so manifestly governed by strict scientific principles—balance and equilibrium! They are always maintained! The tighter and the closer our limbs are bound to-day, the wider and the wilder our skirts will be next year or the year after."

"Grace," Mrs. Winthrop turned toward her with her most ingratiating air, "you haven't been to see me this winter."

"Forgive me, Ameda. It's my misfortune: I am so frightfully busy that I literally haven't time to think."

"Reading novels—dear?" Mrs. Winthrop smiled sweetly. "I have missed you, Grace, for you know I consider you my most intimate friend."

"How gracious of you, Ameda," responded Mrs. Barkley with courteous evasion. "Our lives *have* been thrown together delightfully, haven't they?" She turned to the other women: "Mr. Winthrop was my father's godson and Father

always called him our ecclesiastical cousin: the two families have always been intimate."

Mrs. Winthrop gave her a curious glance from her blue-green eyes.

"It is for your own sake, not for the family's sake, that I love you."

Mrs. Barkley thanked her and then hurried to add as the most conclusive way of ending the topic:

"Ameda, I really will come to you the very first moment I can beg, borrow or steal."

Mrs. Morgan had been keeping a savory morsel too long for her comfort: she could keep it no longer.

"Did you know that Janice Strong has left her husband?"

There were exclamations of surprise, and a suddenly awakened interest as Mrs. Morgan had anticipated. No one had heard it—every one asked—

"Why?"

"She says he bores her!"

"Bores her?—fancy leaving one's husband because he bores one!" Mrs. Gore's tone was enigmatic.

"Peter Strong always bored me to extinction," exclaimed Mrs. Barkley. Mrs. Gore looked surprised:

"I have never met him but I understand that he is called a very deep thinker."

"My dear, there's nothing on earth that bores

one *more* than a deep thinker who doesn't think," said Mrs. Barkley.

"A thinker who doesn't think! Oh, that's lovely!" cried Sally.

"I know," cooed Mrs. Winthrop, "I sat next to a man like that, the other night, and he was impossible! My hostess whispered to me that he was a most distinguished savant: it is needless to say I made the social effort to add to the gaiety of the moment and threw him a shuttlecock of badinage—and he answered with a dull list of statistics!"

"That is just what I mean," said Mrs. Barkley. "I went in to dinner the other night with that Englishman from Oxford, stopping at Mrs. Howard's; she presented him to me in such awed tones that I began to tremble—but I braced up for the honour of American women, took my courage in my hands and made a light and merry jest: the big lion stared at me with unseeing eyes and roared at me that my brilliant originality was a dry-as-dust classic, that Aristophanes, or some other tiresome old fossil, said something like it ages ago. There is nothing more asphyxiating than that kind of a man! I should think Janice would be a drivelling idiot."

"Well, what is she?" asked Sally demurely.

"Hush, Sally, you are really dreadful. The tragic part of it is that he never did bore Janice until Jack Torrence came."

"She has gone from the devil to the deep sea," said one of the women.

"Which is which?" Mrs. Barkley shrugged her lovely shoulders: "Neither of her men is deep enough to be devilish, nor devilish enough to be deep—as for Jack Torrence—he is as shallow as the shoals!"

"Shallow as the shoals—shallow as the shoals—" murmured Sally, "what a dandy song that would make! Shallow as the shoals!"

"Sally, dear, you sound as if you were chanting your own autobiography." Mrs. Winthrop smiled.

"Upon my word!" Sally protested.

"I mean," continued Mrs. Winthrop, "that you keep up a perpetual noise and say nothing."

"Oh, I know what you mean!" Sally had a peppery little temper of her own with all her sunshiny nature: she looked straight into the blue-green eyes: "Should you prefer me to say *something,* Mrs. Winthrop?"

"Who will save us from this dreadful child?" Mrs. Winthrop's voice was honeyed—but her eyes were not pleasant: "We all spoil you, Sally—we make you one of us."

"Why do you do it?" retorted Sally nonchalantly: "It is no fun for me to come to your stupid old dinners, where you married women monopolise all the best men."

"Because you amuse us and you look so

pretty." Mrs. Barkley gave the girl an admiring glance.

"No one is more flattered than you are, Sally," said Mrs. de Lancey; "you know the younger set —your own set—bores you."

"That's a fact—" Sally looked around the group significantly: "I like the devil and the deep sea."

Mrs. de Lancey smiled:

"Sally, you little imp!"

"Oh, I didn't mean you, Mrs. de Lancey—I meant your men—so many of them are both deep and devilish. I have ripping times with them!"

"Holy Virgin! What an extraordinary child!" Mrs. Winthrop raised protesting hands: "American girls are so sophisticated. When I was your age, Sally—that is, when I was married—I was younger than you are when I was married—I did not know a single thing about men nor marriage."

Sally looked daringly at Mrs. Winthrop:

"Just fancy—how innocent—and I know so much! Why, I have already taken a stiff course of reading on the sex question—my word! but they were terrible books!—I began with what Marjory Harris calls the Primer and read two books—I must say the third was too steep even for me so I threw it into the fire after I had read ten pages."

Mrs. Winthrop raised her eyebrows.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she said.

"Sally!—Be careful! Some persons may take

you seriously, my child," said Mrs. Barkley. She lighted another cigarette: "Excellent, these cigarettes! It is a good thing that Mr. Wright can never marry. We should miss him and his bachelor establishment; and then, he would be immensely bored if he were tied down, don't you think? He has a latent restlessness—as though *nothing* satisfied him long."

"It was a cruel condition of his uncle's will to banish women from his life." Mrs. Morgan spoke sympathetically.

Mrs. Barkley glanced slyly from under her lashes:

"Women do not have to be banished from his life—because he cannot marry, do they?"

There was a moment when every one knew what every one else was thinking: then Mrs. Winthrop remarked:

"I do not think Mr. Wright cares to marry."

"Don't you believe it!" said Sally crisply.

"Is he in love with you, Sally?" Mrs. de Lancey asked, amused.

"With me? He doesn't know that I exist—except when he needs me for decorative purposes—to add to the colour-effect of his dinner table. But I know men!"

Mrs. Winthrop opened her sea-green eyes languidly:

"My dear, if you *really* knew men, you wouldn't boast of it."

Sally leaned forward with her arms on her knees, her head in her hand, and looked into space:

"Now what does she mean by that, I wonder?"

CHAPTER X

In the meantime the men were drinking and smoking exceptionally good cigars in the luxurious smoking-room.

John had taken a large room that had been used by his uncle as a store-room, and had made of it an elaborate smoking-room which challenegd the admiration of every man who saw it. In this room John had allowed his imagination, his creative instinct to have full play.

The room was furnished in smoke-colour and the effect was striking: there were old smoke-coloured leather davenports and lounging-chairs, and soft heavy smoke-coloured hangings: the rug was a dull smoke-colour; John had had it made to order abroad and had paid a fabulous price for it: the walls were covered with rare old prints: on the tables were every conceivable convenience to make the way of the smoking man easy and comfortable. Papers and periodicals, in lavish profusion, were piled on the carved oak centre table, which was bright with shaded electric lamps.

In this room John was presiding with ease and distinction. An observer contemplating him would have said he was a bright illustration of Success on the high crest of the wave. Vigour and youth

possessed him, and fortune served him: he was respected, he was envied, and he knew himself a power. He was markedly changed since the Elmcroft days, and yet, at the same time, he was curiously unchanged: he was more mature and he had acquired a worldly poise, but he was absolutely unaffected and had the old irresistible spontaneous charm that came from unaffected simplicity: his dress was too perfect to be noticeable enough for description: he looked five years older, at least, than when he stood in the apple orchard that May morning. The grooming of fashion was becoming to him; the close cut of his hair, the clear smoothness of his face and the finish of his skin suited well his fine features. There was a dawning question in his eyes which added to the charm of the man: it baffled as it attracted; it emphasised and yet it balanced the youthful freshness of his face.

With the exception of John, Horace Winthrop was the best-looking man in the room. He was tall and suave with an air of being intensely bored but with a well-bred surface which concealed his boredom: he gave his entire attention outwardly to what was passing, but one suspected that his thoughts were elsewhere, whether they were on some great enterprise or on the latest French novel one could not be sure.

With Robert Barkley one could be quite sure: he had an air of alertness that suggested big enterprises, vast schemes, and exciting financial

matters: he had a keen eye and a most agreeable manner.

His brother-in-law, Ted Remsen, was an attractive young man, not handsome—all the beauty of the family had fortunately gone to his sister—but with a touch of audacity and daring which made him a prime favourite: he had the fascination of Grace Barkley with the masculine dash added.

Mr. Gore was an intelligent and polished man of the world.

All the men in the smoking-room were clever, well-bred, well-read and in close touch with the moving world, its progress, its problems, and its interests.

The men, interested in watching John's social career, were often surprised that he talked so well and that he was so thoroughly informed on matters of public interest, of National importance and of International affairs.

Ted Remsen was not surprised: he had for John a very genuine enthusiasm which made him think John capable of anything and everything: with characteristic generosity he blew his trumpet far and near.

"John Wright? Why, he is as clever as the devil, and the very best fellow in the world!—knew him well at Harvard—lost track of him awhile, but as soon as he came to New York I looked him up and, my word, but he is cleverer and jollier than ever."

"Sixty millions cleverer and jollier," a listener

had once remarked scoffingly: when Ted had finished giving the man his opinion in unvarnished English the man made a half-apology:

"Don't get so huffy, Remsen, I know it isn't the money: John Wright is a decent enough chap; but you must admit that a man's good qualities shine mighty clear in a sixty million arc light."

"Arc light be damned!" sputtered Ted in answer: "John Wright's good qualities shone as bright at Harvard in the dim candle-light of poverty, when he hadn't a red cent to his name: he could not do the things that he wanted to do, then, but a fellow knew that it was because he *couldn't* and not because he wouldn't!"

"Oh, he's generous all right," the man admitted; "he has a bully way with his money."

The talk to-night had been keen, crisp and clever: the men were all wide awake and each had something to contribute to the hour: it had circled around subjects of public and national interest; politics and party factions which make difficult complications; financial questions, which are far deeper than their terms indicate, affecting the entire body politic and involving the whole fabric of democracy: and there was as always the vexed and complicated problem of Mexico—a subject which, once opened by thoughtful and intelligent men, was sure to incite argument and discussion: there were various points of view—each zealously held and each set forth in eloquent or forensic

fashion, according to the measure of the men who spoke. A bleeding Sister Republic, on the borders of our land, dashing on toward ruin, the prey of civil strife, was bound to claim the attention of thinking men, in any event—but when that opulent country was bearing fruit from American planting and when its mines were operated by American gold and, above all, when within its borders were American citizens whose lives were constantly endangered—it became a vital question to absorb every intelligent man in public life and to haunt every thinker in public or private life. The argument regarding Mexico had been animated this evening, for matters there were at a serious crisis.

John had been speaking well, and—a special charm of his—he had, also, been listening well.

"What you say, Morgan," John continued, "is very true, but how can we form any accurate judgment of Mexico? We are so utterly ignorant of all conditions there: we do not even speak a common language. In our own country, with the closest observation and study, we find it difficult to decide the simplest matter with fairness and justice, and how can we decide Mexican problems —how can we dare to dictate—how can we choose between assassins? Who can say which is the best or which is the worst—Villa the Terrible—Carranza the Uncertain—or Huerta the Strong?"

"Villa and Carranza, at least, are for the peons," said Ted Remsen, "and that ought to

decide you, John, for you always had such a craze for the great 'democratic ideal,' as you call it."

"How can we know they are?" answered John. "If I felt that Carranza and Villa were *really* honestly working for the emancipation of the peon, that would be one thing: but if they are championing the peons to make capital—if they are using them as stepping-stones for their own advantage, then the last state of the poor peons will be worse than the first. It is a crying wrong to allow any portion of a people to be submerged —but it is a greater wrong to use that submerged portion for political exploitation."

"But, good Heavens, Wright, you wouldn't go back on your democratic ideal of constitutional government and recognise Huerta, would you?"

"Certainly, I should recognise Huerta. What right have we to obtrude our dictum upon Mexico?—What business is it of ours?—He is president de facto—as such he is recognised in Mexico: as such the European powers recognise him. We have boasted to all the world that our aim is to help humanity: and by way of helping that distracted country we butt in to a situation that we don't understand and of which we cannot judge. What right have we to stir up more strife by forcing Huerta out?"

"But if he is a murderer?" argued Ted.

"What if he is—so are they all! Shall the United States be the arbiter of murderers?—the selecter of cut-throats?—A dignified position for

the United States, surely!" John spoke impatiently.

"That isn't fair, John."

"It reminds me," John went on, "of a big bully who, seeing some starving poverty-stricken children ravenously eating a loaf of bread, comes up softly and says: 'I want to serve and *help* you, my dear children; that bread was not baked properly,' and then forthwith snatches the bread away from the children—and leaves them to starve."

"But if he gives the children good nutritious food in the place of the undigestible bad-baked bread?" persisted Ted.

"Ah! *If!*" John tossed his head: "Do you mean the humane and moral Villa?"

"Villa and Carranza."

"Mark my word," John spoke eagerly, "the time will surely come when we shall rue the day we played at meddling—interfered without settling and made the muddle more mixed. Villa, like a firebrand, will *surely* burn the bridges that have been laid for him, and Carranza may bite the breast that has warmed him."

"Have you ever been in Mexico?" asked Robert Barkley.

"I have, in my college days," answered John: "one of the most beautiful places in the world—its people, young and old, ignorant and educated, have the simplicity of children. What is called their treachery comes from an undeveloped child-[redacted]quality. We could do anything in the world

with them!—as it is, our policy of meddling is not protecting our own citizens nor our property: and it is making a bitter spirit amongst the Mexicans that is worse for us—and it is not helping Mexico—we are heaping horror upon horrors."

"What nonsense, John!" said Ted: "We are doing the best we can."

"Are we?" John replied coolly: "The 'best we can' would be to have a conference of all the intelligent, experienced and wise men of the country —democrats and republicans—to seriously and earnestly consult and decide what is the best. It is not worthy of the dignity of this country to found our policy, in such a delicate and hectic situation, on private and prejudiced information from private and amateur sources. Moreover, we are giving the glad hand—with ammunition in it, mind you!—to men whom we *do not* know, upon whom we cannot count and thereby we are encouraging the very demoralisation that we deplore. Suppose we banish Huerta, and install Villa or Carranza—become their sponsors—and they go back on us—what then?"

"But they won't," said Ted: "I met a man the other day who told me he had seen a lot of Villa and that he is a patriot."

"And I met a man," broke in John, "who refused to see a lot of Villa, because after a brief view of him and a detailed report concerning him my friend was convinced that he was a butcher—a fiend in human form—and as for Carranza—

friend was convinced that he was an oily treacherous hypocrite. There are two opposite opinions —and we should be mighty sure which is the right one before we assume the risk of championing the one or the other."

"Huerta is the best of the lot." Mr. Gore spoke decidedly.

"I *think* so myself, but I don't *know*," said John. "I do know, however, that we cannot judge and I know that we should let the Mexicans settle the matter and not interfere—except to protect our own citizens!"

"Well, you see if it isn't all settled peacefully and satisfactorily before 1916," said Ted.

"Doubtless it will be outwardly settled," replied John: "at the first show of decision on our part Mexico will quail before us. We are the big bully and Mexico is the small boy dizzy with dreadful blows and loss of blood, but our course has sown seeds of hatred that, in the far future, will spring up—a Nemesis!"

"The Mexicans are our brothers," quoted Ted smilingly.

"We can't expect a primitive people to understand that kind of brotherly love," answered John seriously: "we land at Vera Cruz, pull down their flag, hoist our own and take possession of the city: we mean it as a fine friendly act, perhaps, but it looks rather different to the poor peons who translate brotherliness by kindness: [redacted]hoot men by the hundreds—they are snipers,

perhaps, and ought to be shot; but to the Mexicans they are men—sons, fathers, husbands, whose death must be revenged. The peons whom we go to save hate us for our enterprise and our superiority: they think a dictator is a despot—but that they understand: they think a gringo is an unknown quantity which must be gotten out of the way at any cost."

"Thank Heaven, here's a copy of *Punch,*" said Norman Gore with the gusto of an epicure confronted with a favourite dish: "Wright, yours is about the only private house where I ever see *Punch,* except my own, and mine was late this week."

He was soon lost in the pages of the paper:

"Don't tell me the English haven't any humour," he muttered.

"I should certainly never dream of saying anything so contrary to facts, Gore."

"You Americans always pretend you think that we haven't any humour."

"Not I: the humour and wit of the Englishman —especially if he is a Celt—are delicious!" John smiled.

" 'An Englishman, especially if he is a Celt!' I like that!" drawled Mr. Gore.

"Oh, come off, Gore! Don't disprove, by illustration, Wright's defence of your confounded humour! England, according to the poet, is made up of Normans, of Danes, of Saxons and of Celts."

Robert Barkley spoke with animation. John, with the courtesy for which he was conspicuous, hastened to say:

"I have never been able to understand why that strange perversion exists: English humour is an intellectual tonic, and English cartoons are inimitable!—exaggerated sometimes and sometimes coarse, as all cartoons are—but on the whole screamingly funny, humorous and witty: certainly cartoons are a criterion of wit and humour."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Robert Barkley: "They are the *best* criterion and they are also the best commentary upon the history and life of a nation."

"There was an awfully good cartoon in one of the New York papers," said Ted Remsen, "taking off the crowd at the Metropolitan Opera House. Did you see it? My eyes! but it was funny! It was called 'The Backsliders'—It was the women in modern gowns, seen from the *rear* of the boxes! By the way, John, I see by the papers that you have bought a box at the Metropolitan. Is it true?"

"Yes," John answered simply: "I am awfully fond of music and I wanted my own box for the Wagner Operas."

"Music? Holy Moses! You don't call that Wagner crash, smash, hash, music, do you? But I shouldn't mind having a box myself," and Ted Remsen made an amusing gesture: "I am not

fond of that stuff you call music, but I am distractingly fond of pretty women—white shoulders and smart clothes, and it must be bully to have a cozy little box to shut them up in, where they *can't* escape, and have them all to one's self. Anything would be bearable in those circumstances—even Dicky Wagner!"

"Ted! And you were on the Glee Club at Harvard!" exclaimed John.

"Oh, there we had *music!* But the noise of the one named Wagner *isn't music!*"

"We will argue out that question some day, and I will convert you: when you are converted we will go together to 'The Meistersinger,' and there I will make you surrender horse, foot and dragoon."

Ted brightened.

"Will you ask Miss Sally to go the same night?"

"Surely, I need her help to convert you." John, glancing around the room, saw that the men had finished smoking.

"We will go and pre-empt her this very minute." He pushed back his chair from the table and led the way to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI

The women in the drawing-room heard the sound of voices and steps in the hall. Instantly and almost imperceptibly a wave of attention stirred the circle—some of the women put their hands adjustingly over their hair and slyly rearranged details of their garments. Sally watched them out of the corners of her quick eyes—a half smile on her bright lips: and a loving tribute in her eyes as she looked at Mrs. Barkley, who never concerned herself with herself after she and her maid had once given the matter of her toilette careful consideration: Grace Barkley made no effort to hold men by any artifice of manner or of toilette. After she had studied her toilette carefully—which she considered a social duty—she dismissed the subject with spacious unconcern. Her enemies said that it was because "she was so self-satisfied she felt she could not be improved," but her friends said that it was because "she had so little self-consciousness." Be that as it may, she was never known to fuss or fidget with her chiffons nor to push and pull her ornaments. Perhaps it was this very quality of complete self-forgetfulness which made her especially charming —so Sally thought.



A servant opened the velvet curtains of the drawing-room and the men entered: last of all came John: he stood for a moment against the crimson background as the curtains fell behind him: he seemed a fitting master for this sumptuous room—a fitting host for this bright array.

He went at once to Sally: Ted Remsen followed him. Sally gave them a welcoming smile.

"Miss Sally, I need your help: may I count on you?"

"Say yes, Miss Sally—please say yes!" cried Ted.

"With pleasure, Mr. Wright. What is it—slumming or campaigning? It is all one to a woman, so long as she is in the lime-light."

"It is educational."

"Teaching? Good! I love to teach!"

"Bully!" said Ted: "You will bear witness, John, to Miss Sally's public confession that she loves to teach. You are committed, Miss Sally —you've promised! I am the pupil!"

"Heavens, what a contract!" said Sally: then she straightened herself with mock solemnity and spoke in mimicry of a certain well-known pedagogue in New York—"Modern education is—as one derivation of the word implies—'a drawing out!' May I ask what is to be drawn out in this instance?" She looked bewitchingly pretty.

"My word!" said Ted dejectedly, "when you look like that you may draw out any old thing

from my hair to my eye-teeth and I won't give a wink."

"I will leave you with your pupil, Miss Sally," said John, "but first may I ask a favour of you? Will you give me the evening of the thirtieth? After you have had two weeks to work your genius upon this scholar, to teach him an appreciation of Wagner, I want your presence at 'The Meistersinger' to see him capitulate, as the result of your instruction. He now assaults Wagner's music abominably—he needs enlightenment."

"Oh, I know," said Sally, "he never goes to a Wagner Opera, and yet he keeps the mulish obstinacy of ignorance; I have often thought of taking him in hand, but I hadn't the patience nor the courage: now I will do so for your sake."

"Thank you, Miss Sally," said John; and added: "Will you dine with Mr. Remsen and me —and a chaperon, of course—and go to the Opera, on the thirtieth?"

"Thanks, Mr. Wright. May I let you know tomorrow? I must look at my calendar—I think I am engaged every night for a year ahead! Some of my engagements can be adjusted and some cannot. May I see what I can do about the thirtieth? I would do anything, short of crime, for 'The Meistersinger'—I am not sure that I would stop at crime!—I *think* I can arrange it."

"Bully for you, Miss Sally!" cried Ted: "We

will *meister* together and 'we will *sing*' together, and John will beat the tom-tom."

"Let me know at your convenience, Miss Sally," said John, as he walked away.

"Go on, Sally!" said Ted. "Begin—amo, amas, amat——"

"You don't suppose I am going to teach anything so old-fashioned as LOVE, do you?"

"I hope so," sighed Ted. "According to an old College song, which my Father used to sing in his time, that blessed verb is, really, very modern and advanced.

> " 'Amo, amas, I loved a lass,
> And she was tall and slender!
>
> " 'Amo, amat, she knocked me flat,
> Although of the feminine gender!'

That's jolly modern, isn't it?—quite up to date—realism—feminism and all that sort of thing."

"You goose!" said Sally.

"Teacher, let's begin with zoology—bend your great intellect to my limitations: How can a creature be a mule and a goose at the same time?"

Through the interminable time of smoking, and through the hour of separation by the length of the long dining-table, John had waited impatiently since eight o'clock for the moment with Mrs. Winthrop—and therefore he walked straight to Mrs. Barkley: she was talking with Horace Winthrop.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, glad of a diversion, "How wonderful 'The New Day' is—I am so glad you bought it! Robert and I saw it at Knoedler's —we wanted to buy it, but we might as well have thought of paying the National Debt—it was so far beyond us."

"Have you looked at it from the other side of the room?" John's tone betrayed that he was speaking of something dear and valued—"That is a better light. May I show it to you from there? Come, Winthrop." John turned to Mrs. Barkley: "Mr. and Mrs. Winthrop were with me when I first saw the picture and I had the benefit of their judgment: Mr. Winthrop is an excellent judge of pictures, you know." John had touched Horace Winthrop at his point of pride.

"I envy and congratulate you, Wright," he said: "it is a gem—I should have bought it if I had seen it before you did."

Mrs. Barkley rose, quite conscious that she was the envy of the other women, and walked with John to the new picture, sat in the chair which he turned for her, and gave herself up to the contemplation of the marvel before her. By the hand of the artist, the world of spring-time and of beauty—softly shadowed by the mystery of dawn-light—had been brought within the four walls of the stone house on this winter night. Mrs. Barkley was conspicuous for sharing the favours that Fate threw in her way: moreover, she was keenly, cleverly conscious of the advantages of a sym-



pathetic appreciation of the enthusiasms of her host.

"Ameda—Robert—Sally!" she called, "come —and see the picture from here." They came and others followed them: there was much enthusiasm over the truly great work of art—the atmosphere, the perspective, the colour.

"It certainly is great!" said Horace Winthrop, with the air of authority as he studied it.

"I say, but it's swell," said one of the men, who, also, prided himself on his knowledge of art.

"What a peculiar light!" said Mrs. Vaughn—a young bride. "I never saw just such a light."

There was a general laugh.

"It is the dawn just before sunrise, Mrs. Vaughn. Did you never see the dawn?"

"Why, how can it be the dawn?" said this naïve lady: "Look at the star in the sky."

John's eyes twinkled: "Allow me to present to you the morning star, Madame."

Mrs. Vaughn was a trifle embarrassed:

"Oh, of course! How stupid of me! But I do not think that many of you have ever seen the dawn or the sunrise," Mrs. Vaughn spoke defiantly, recovering her self-possession.

"I agree with you, Mrs. Vaughn, women are usually asleep when we come home from dinners," said one of the men.

Sally, who was standing a little apart, heard the remark and said:

"Evidently you have never been in camp, Mrs. Vaughn, or you would have seen sunrises and dawns galore—the Heavens are our movies in camp: dawn—sunrise—high noon—sunset—moonlight—move in splendid procession: but the dawn is the best of all! Oh, it is wonderful—beautiful!"

"Sally," whispered Ted, who was standing beside her, "is Mrs. Vaughn plain fooling or is she fibbing?"

"Neither," said Sally, "she hasn't the faintest conception of dawn: she looks as though she only knew curtains and candle-light—poor thing!"

"You can't fool your Uncle Dudley! She *must* know the sunrise—*every one* does—she is fooling!"

"She is *not!*" said Sally decidedly: "It's perfectly amazing but, really, there are many persons who have never seen a sunrise—much less a dawn—it is surprising how few persons know the best in life!"

"I do!" said Ted, looking at Sally with adoring eyes. Sally continued as though she had not heard the personal interjection.

"They never see Nature except when She is in full dress all tricked out in fancy frills for a fête or a lawn-party. Why, just imagine! I read the other day that when Christina Rossetti was *over forty years old* she saw the sunrise for the *first* time in her life: some one took her to see *it and* she was wonder-struck, it was a perfectly



new phenomenon to her—think of it!—and she was a poet!"

"Christina Rossetti a poet? Thunder and Mars! I hope your curriculum doesn't include a course in her poetry—'Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese—Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese,' " droned Ted in solemn tones.

Sally turned flashing eyes upon him.

"How dare you make fun of Christina Rossetti —you irreverent creature!"

"It's not my irreverence, it's Calverley—have you never read Calverley?"

"No, and if he parodies Christina Rossetti I don't want to read him!"

"Yes, you do! You must not miss Calverley from life—he's ripping! I'll send you a copy to-morrow; but, anyway, the lady parodies herself—

'O Mother, Mary Mother,
Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven!' "

"That's not Christina, you stupid—that's Dante Gabriel Rossetti."

"Well, I may not know *which* it is, but I know *what* it is mighty well!"

"What is it?" For once Sally was off her guard.

"It's standing between you and that raging, roaring, mob!" and Ted indicated by a nod of his head the animated group around the picture.

"How frightfully impolite you are, Ted!"

"Oh, come to the conservatory, Sally—please come and educate me—come and draw out what's in me—you'll like it, truly you will; it's——"

"Hush, Ted, you *must* be sensible!" and Sally moved toward the group. John was still gazing at the picture. Sally had not heard what had been said, but she heard John's answer: he spoke absently, quietly, with his eyes still upon it.

"Indeed, I know the dawn—every light and shade of it—I have been out many a morning in that very light waiting for the sunrise—and when the sun rose, then I followed the plough."

The men exchanged glances—they were startled, not by the fact but by John's frank way of admitting the fact. The women looked quickly at John; the contrast between his immaculate dress, his air of elegance, and his words, with the reminiscent look in his eyes—as he gazed at the picture and seemed to be wandering upon those dewy hills—stirred the romance in the hearts of the women. Most women, however conventional or worldly they may be, have a latent something which makes them, in their leisure hours, turn to books of high adventure to forget, in their pages, the world which they so slavishly follow. The unusualness of John's frankness, the straightforward admission of his past, balanced by the present personality of the man, held a fascination for the women; but no one knew just what to say: the glib tongues were silenced. Mrs. Winthrop—who had a wholly unsolicited and wholly



unnecessary sense of responsibility about John—was a little frightened, not knowing what this mood—new to her—might mean: fearing he would go too far, with quick tact and readiness, she tried to give the situation a safe turn:

"All Hail! Cincinnatus," she said lightly, and bowed to John charmingly.

"Isn't he splendid?" Sally whispered to Ted, who had followed her.

"You bet he is! I always told you so!" Ted whispered back.

"A modern Cincinnatus, upon my word!" said Robert Barkley, slapping John on the back.

"Pardon me," John answered, "it was nothing so ambitious. Do you know, I have always thought that Cincinnatus' attitude was something of a pose."

"A *pose*?"

"Yes: a very delightful pose, if you will—a pose that came from self-deception, if you choose—but still a pose: Cincinnatus had the Senate of Rome and a high place in the State as the background to his plough: I had no outlet beyond the furrows of the soil—except the gate of the farm, which led to—to the apple orchard."

What was that look in John's eyes? It was like a sharp prick to the Parisian heart of Mrs. Winthrop: she thought it wise and prudent to bring John back from apple orchards and sunrise mysteries to the present: she turned with her most bewitching air:

"Most gracious host, when are we to have the delights that you have prepared for us?"

Mrs. Winthrop was conscious that John had to stride over a great gulf to get back to her and to the moment.

"Do you mean the Russian dancers?" he asked: "they are to begin at ten-thirty. I think it must be that now."

As if Fate were working on Mrs. Winthrop's behalf, a servant at that moment drew the curtains at the entrance to the ball-room and at once an eager animation took possession of the guests; at John's suggestion they began to move into the ball-room. Mrs. Winthrop stopped to look for her gloves. "Lost by design," Grace Barkley whispered to Ted in passing. John, the courteous host, lingered to assist in the search.

"The dinner was perfect, John," Mrs. Winthrop whispered.

"You are here, Mrs. Winthrop," he answered, "that insures perfection."

"Will you come to-morrow, at five?" The look that she gave him would have made the blood of an older and a colder man than John stir quickly in his pulses.

"Do you realise that is eighteen-and-a-half long hours away?"

She laughed lightly:

"How could you calculate so quickly? I should have to have pencil and paper. But they will be *dancing*—we must go."



"No one will dance—nothing will happen until *you* arrive."

John spoke with the air of an autocrat: she could afford now to go into the other room and let things take their course: that reminiscent look in John's eyes was entirely gone: it was doubtless nothing; a memory of his boyhood—the thought of his mother, for whom it was well known he had a tender sentiment; and sentiment gives flavour to life, if it is not too obtrusive nor too apparent.



CHAPTER XII

One bright morning in February John sat reading his morning papers. As the clock struck he pushed back his chair in haste, threw down the editorial sheet, muttering to himself—

"They shouldn't write so well if a man is to keep his appointments. Is the car at the door?" he called.

"Yes, sir," answered a servant.

John looked hastily at his watch.

"I am five minutes late. Peterson can make it."

The morning exit of John, especially when he was in a hurry, was one of the smaller incidents which illustrated his lordly dominion in his new world. His valet stood, observant, ready with his fur-lined coat: his secretary was always flying at his orders up the stairs to his den for last-remembered papers: the butler came from the dining-room and stood in the dignity of his office waiting for any order that might be flung to him: a footman with alertness opened the door of the house for the Master to pass out: a footman from the car opened the door of the car and took out the fur rug to place correctly over the Master's knees *when he entered* his elaborate limousine. It all



happened with the regularity and despatch of military precision.

An impersonal realisation of it flashed upon John's brain this morning notwithstanding his haste; it satisfied his sense of fitness that on this special day, he, John Remington Wright, should be so served.

He was to meet Winthrop, Barkley, Remsen and some other prominent men at the Metropolitan Museum—to look with them at some splendid pictures he had given to the Museum. By a happy chance a famous collection of old Masters had been sold in London when he was abroad; and John, with the enthusiasm of a boy, inwardly, but outwardly with the composure and finesse of a man who might have been long-accustomed to such purchases, had bought four splendid canvases to give to the city in his uncle's name.

They had been approved with enthusiasm, and accepted by the Committee. They had been hung the day before. John was impatient to see them once again, and to show them to his friends, who were keen with interest and curiosity regarding the gift.

John turned his intellectual cleverness to all matters of social procedure. He had the wit to know that it is a great mistake to force one's self upon the public directly, even in generosity or philanthropy. Old John Remington had not cared for art, but his name was well established, and he was a great power in the financial world of



New York; so John gave the pictures in his uncle's name and kept himself out of the lime-light. By so doing he gained the more prestige from his gift.

He had awakened this morning full of a delightful thrill of anticipation. Before he bought them he had taken great pains to have them passed upon by expert authorities, that he might ascertain their value, although his own intuitive sense had been sure of their interest and their supreme beauty.

Was there anything more satisfying, more beautiful, than the Tintoretto with its living vivid colour throbbing behind the sombre veil which the centuries had laid over the canvas?—the graceful women, the bearded men and the little curved and dimpled children were *alive!* He had not seen them since that day in London, months before: now he was to see them hung by his will in the city to which he belonged by right of ancestry, if not by right of birth.

As he ran quickly down the steps impatient to be off, he was aware of a man, in tattered and soiled clothes, lolling by the limousine. Some power stronger than his will made John pause, notwithstanding his great haste: it was only for a second but in one swift appraising glance he took in the whole aspect of the man: his dirt, his dogged air, his general aspect of wretchedness. He had an evil face with bloodshot shifty eyes! A



chilly wave swept through John's veins: for some curious reason he felt like a runner stopped in a race by a death-cold hand when he is nearing the goal: he hesitated for a moment and then sprang into the car—the footman put the rug over him with precise care:

"Tell Peterson he must be at the Metropolitan Museum in five minutes."

"Yes, Sir."

The footman touched his hat and jumped into his place. Before the car could start, the man darted forward and thrust his head in at the window of the car.

"Say, mister——"

"I'm sorry," said John quickly, "but I am in a great hurry. Ring the bell and ask for Mrs. Rawley, the housekeeper; tell her I said to give you whatever you need."

Into the shifty bloodshot eyes came a vindictive look: the man kept his hand on the window of the car:

"Say, it's you I want, not your housekeeper; and it's you I'll have."

"Go on, Peterson," John called impatiently. The car began to move and the man was jolted backward.

In five minutes John was at the Metropolitan Museum and the gentlemen who had gathered to meet him were welcoming him with enthusiasm, warmth and acclaim.

The next morning John awakened with sensuous delight hovering in his memory—fair women and dimpled children with glowing faces and shining hair moved before him: a great curtain of royal purple was caught back before his closed eyes revealing in the background a landscape and a horizon that melted into beauty of colour—ineffable, indescribable. He had a sense of having been in some far-off, much-desired place: as he became more fully awake there obtruded amongst the subtle Venetian folk the keen American faces of his friends.

John turned his thoughts away from the modern magnates and gave himself up to seeing once again with closed eyes those little children so inexpressibly lovely—and—what was that?—that face so evil—so repellent? Notwithstanding the warmth of his downy covering his flesh was roughened by a chill into goose flesh. Why did that face obtrude amongst the cherubs? In which picture was it? Ah! it was not in any one of the pictures: it was the face of the man who had stood beside the limousine when he had hurried away to see his splendid gift to the City: the man who had looked at him with bloodshot vindictive eyes: the man for whom he had not stopped on his triumphant way.



CHAPTER XIII

"Will you have cream?—and is it one lump—or two?"

Mrs. Winthrop's intonation made this tiresome commonplace sound like the beginning of a song.

"One, please," answered John, "and no cream."

Mrs. Winthrop began delving her antique sugar-tongs into the priceless bowl to find the sugar, an occupation which showed her beautiful hand and finely curved wrist to perfection. John looked admiringly at the woman, sitting at her well-ordered tea table: art and nature had marvellously combined to produce a finished product: beauty and culture of face, beauty and culture of voice, and consummate skill in dress made a result that would be difficult to equal.

During the past month John had been coming more and more under the spell of this subtle siren of the senses. She was clever and John had begun by enjoying her cleverness, impersonally, but the spell of her personality had begun to weave itself around him: the sensuous satisfaction in her presence had gotten to be something akin to drink or opium: each time he let himself yield to

the intoxication he found it harder to resist the next time. As yet, he was thoroughly master of himself and, therefore, he was master of her imagination, such as she had: he piqued her while he charmed her because there was in him a baffling something which she could not quite break down.

When Ameda Winthrop could not break down a man she could generally lull him to forgetfulness: her low purling voice had a narcotic quality: even when John heard it in conversation with another, whilst he was chatting with some one else, he was conscious of a strange allurement. The fine finish of her beauty was a satisfaction to him: and whilst he felt no sense of inspiration from any vital sympathy with his thoughts, he felt his mental feathers stroked the right way by an outward agreement with his theories, his opinions and his flights.

It had come to be a frequent habit with him to drop in at this hour for a word with her—a sight of her in her restfully harmonious setting. Her rooms had a peculiar charm: they were very foreign and yet, at the same time, they were essentially home-like: when one sat amidst their soft colour-tones—amidst the unusual combination of rare, antique, artistic and feminine things, and talked of international politics, literature and gossip, one felt in touch with the great world, and yet quite apart from the rush of modern life.

This bleak March afternoon it seemed especially reposeful to John, for it had been a busy day of



bothersome details. The monotonous, exacting grind of duties connected with the estate was getting to be more and more of a bore.

Mrs. Winthrop found the lump of precise proportions, poured the tea and handed the cup to John.

"I know," she murmured in her dulcet tones, "you dislike cream and take always only *one* lump of sugar and that a very tiny one."

"May I inquire, Madame," John said, as he took the cup, "why you did me the honour to ask my preference, when you did me the greater honour to remember it?"

Ameda Winthrop smiled her subtle smile; she was silent for a moment whilst by her magnetic projection electric currents were set in swift vibration.

"If I were to tell you, Mr. Wright, I should be betraying the secrets of the fortress."

"Do you live in a fortress, Madame? I had not felt anything so formidable in your presence."

"That is because of my perfect strategy—but under the soft banks of heaped green is a solid wall of defence bristling with loaded guns."

"Indeed? Is there then war between us?"

"Oh, no, at present there is peace." She sipped her tea a moment, then added: "But I am a staunch advocate of Defence: you and I never quarrel—because I am always prepared for war."

John laid down his teacup.



"The gates of *my* fortress have opened wide," he said.

"There is no enemy so deadly dangerous as the one who is strong enough to open the gates," she murmured; "one must beware *then* of all times."

"The gates of my fortress are open wide—will you come in, Ameda?"

It was the first time John had called her by her name—she felt her pulses quicken: Ameda Winthrop had long ago lost the power of the sensitive to blush, but when she drooped her beautiful eyelids with their long golden-brown lashes, it seemed to John as if she *had* blushed.

"Is that a confession that you are dangerous?" she said softly, lifting her eyes.

"Is your question a confession that you are afraid?" John held her gaze.

"Perhaps."

There was a pause: then she added in her low singing voice,

"And if it is?"

She pushed back her chair, turning from the table. John rose and stood beside her. As he stood there looking down upon her the subconscious part of her mind registered, above the delicious thrill of the moment, the fact that he was a most attractive, compelling creature and very good to look at.

The way his close-cropped hair grew on his forehead, the way his clear strong eyes defied all *external* conventions, the illusive whimsical smile



around the corners of his mouth, were all charming, she thought: even the fit of his clothes and the fold of his necktie did not escape her.

"There is only one way to conquer fear." His voice was tense: "Do you know what that way is, Ameda?"

She did not answer him with words; she rose, went to the table where, in a rare bowl of carved jade, were some fresh violets which John had sent her in the morning. She selected a little bunch and brought it to John: he graciously inclined his head as she placed the violets in his button-hole, but he did not speak: a fierce impulse was strong within him to take her in his arms to break through the polished surface which veneered her, contradicted by her eyes, but some power stronger than his passion held him in check.

A sound of footsteps in the hall! the curtains opened and Mrs. Barkley entered, bringing with her a festive air of the outside world.

"How do you do, Ameda?" she said in her buoyant way: "You see, I have succeeded in stealing my moment—at last. I am a brave woman, I assure you, for I had to run the gauntlet of a mad committee to make my escape, to go home to dress early that I might stop here before going to Mrs. Ogden's tea. I vowed another week should not pass without my coming to this charming room and its charming mistress—O John, you here! I am *so* glad to see you!"

Mrs. Winthrop covered her deep annoyance at the interruption with honeyed phrases: but she was mentally planning the outline of a sharp reproof she would give the footman for disobeying orders in admitting any one, as she poured out verbally her rapture at seeing Mrs. Barkley, and her appreciation of Mrs. Barkley's efforts.

"Are you going to the tea, Ameda?" asked Mrs. Barkley.

"*Mon Dieu,* no! Teas bore me."

"Certainly," Mrs. Barkley gave a long sigh, "they bore every one to extinction."

"Then, why go, Mrs. Barkley?" John asked, amused.

"Because I *promised,* fool that I was, I promised. Once I met a woman who said, '*I* make it a rule never to have an intimate woman friend.' Amazed, I asked her why, and she said with the utmost naïveté, 'I am afraid! Intimacy gives a woman the right to come upstairs when you are ill, and then you are always off guard; you feel a miserable rag—as blue as ink—and before you know it you have confided all your secrets.' I know just how she felt."

"Why? Do you follow her example?" said Mrs. Winthrop.

"I?—indeed, no! I have more women than men friends, or as many—and I never tell any of my secrets—I have found a clever way to avoid doing that—but, unfortunately, I do the next worst *thing!*—when I am off guard I *do make promises.*

In an evil moment when I was down with a blind cold and a dreadful headache—I saw Mrs. Ogden; she came up to my room; I was in bed; I felt as limp as wet chiffon—and she was *so* kind and sympathetic! I believe she stroked my forehead—no one ever strokes my forehead—it mesmerised me! And before I knew it, I had promised faithfully to go to her tea to-day, so of course I *must* go. I cannot tell a lie, you know!"

"Certainly not," cooed Mrs. Winthrop: "you *never* told a lie, did you, Grace?"

Mrs. Barkley gave her a flashing look.

"Your voice sounds as though you *thought* I was a Sapphira—I am not, I assure you. Do you know I never have been able to understand why our National Arbiter of Ethics did not start a Sapphira club to match his Ananias club."

"When women get the franchise, he will," said John.

Mrs. Barkley gave a dramatic shudder.

"That will be an added terror to the franchise. Women will then be publicly branded as liars just as men are now. But he can't make me a member because I invariably speak the *exact* truth. Oh, do give me a cup of tea, Ameda. I always have to drink *two* cups of the very strongest tea, to fortify myself to go to a tea. Is there anything quite so hopeless as a tea?"

"Yes, one," said John: "a dinner party of the wrong persons—for there one can't escape."

"I do not think that is nearly so hopeless,"

said Mrs. Winthrop, "for at a dinner party one is at least cool and comfortable."

"What advantage women have," sighed John; "we men may not get our beautiful shoulders free, our lovely arms bare and so be cool and comfortable at dinner."

"But you generally keep your head cool," laughed Mrs. Barkley, "and that is the main thing. I would give you my beautiful bare shoulders any day for your strong cool head."

John remembered with an inward start how near he had been to losing his head a moment before.

"Ameda, mayn't I have my tea?" Mrs. Barkley looked appealing.

"Yes, dear, I have rung for some hot."

"No, no, I want it just as it is, with lemon and no sugar. I love the sugar but my mirror cries out against it."

"Grace, you could stand several pounds more without the slightest peril."

"How delightfully tactful you are! Wouldn't you know, John, that Mrs. Winthrop is French? She foresees what is coming and prepares me with compliments and comfort."

"I invariably speak the *exact* truth, my dear." Mrs. Winthrop made this assertion with a smiling, dainty mimicry of Mrs. Barkley.

"Oh, then you can't belong to the Sapphira club, either: another bond between us!"

Mrs. Winthrop handed Mrs. Barkley her tea. She drank it with relish:

"Your tea is perfection, Ameda. Oh, how much nicer it is here in this peaceful quiet room than in that crush to which I go!"

"Don't go, then."

"I *told* you that I *promised* and I told you that I always keep my promises."

Mrs. Barkley spoke with mock severity.

"Fate has been unusually kind to me," said John: "I have met two women who always tell the exact truth and always keep their promises."

"I do—always—that is—sooner or later." Mrs. Barkley gave a quick nod of her lovely head. "My Bob said to me the other day, 'Muvver, what is a pwomise?' Just fancy one's son asking such a technical question. I was staggered but I had to rise to the occasion: first I was going to tell him to ask his father and then I knew Robert would make it so simple to the child that he would say 'why didn't muvver know *that?*' so I went into a most elaborate analysis of promises. I really deserve a medal for mental merit, I made it so explicit and clear to Bobs: he listened quietly until I had finished, then he opened his eyes and looked at me with that queer look that always makes me feel as though I were a deep-dyed villain and said, 'Do peoples ever bwake pwomises, muvver?' I was frightened: I didn't know whether the child was merely a clever scientist seeking general information or whether he was a member of an in-

vestigating Committee—like those men in Washington. To my horror I suddenly remembered that, the day before, I had promised him some peppermints and until that moment I had forgotten it! He had me on the hip: I answered guardedly, 'Sometimes, Bobbie,' and what do you think he said? *'Eh bien'*—you know he mixes his French and his English—'I wish when peoples bwake their pwomises to Bobbie they would give Bobbie the bwoken pieces.' "

"Hurrah for Bobs!" John's face was aglow.

"I was covered with confusion," continued Mrs. Barkley. "I was just going out and I went straight to Huyler's and sent him a ten-pound box."

"Grace, you will kill the child!" exclaimed Mrs. Winthrop.

"Not at all—it's a fixed rule that he can have only four candies at a time—and he is very obedient—but I thought it would reassure him to *see* a lot."

"What a delightful boy Bobbie is, Mrs. Barkley."

There was an expression that came into John's eyes as he spoke that was most pleasant to see. His devotion to children was one of his saving graces. Mrs. Barkley looked at John with friendly eyes.

"He is a darling! You ought to like him, John. He adores you! Do you know what he calls you?"

"Please tell me. I'm keen to know."



"He calls you 'that man what's nicer.' "

"That man who is nicer! How adorable!" said Mrs. Winthrop. "How old is he, Grace?"

"He longs to be a man—like his father—and so he makes the most of his age. He says he's 'quarter past four, going *fast* on to five, and that's *almost* six.' "

She turned to John.

"John, in all the favours that fortune has flung into your lap with such lavish and reckless hand did you ever have anything better than Bobbie's tribute?"

"Never!" said John emphatically.

Mrs. Barkley turned to Mrs. Winthrop.

"You should have heard Bobs describe John to Billy Garrett, his little *fidus Achates*. 'You don't know John?' he said. 'You ought to know John'—he hears his father and his uncle Ted saying John—and he will do it, no matter what I say——"

"Don't stop him!" interrupted John.

Mrs. Barkley continued:

" 'What's he look like?' asked practical Billy. Bobbie thought a moment, then he painted John's portrait with the free hand of an expert—'He's got kinkly hair,' he said; 'he's got a jolly laughing mouth and his eyes look like out-of-doors! He's an awful big man; but he's got a little boy inside of him that comes out to play with ovver little boys.'—Isn't that perfectly lovely?"

"I feel as though I had received a degree or a decoration."

John spoke earnestly, his eyes glowed: and Mrs. Barkley told herself that she saw in those eyes a glimpse of the little boy who came out to play with other little boys.

"You well may!" she said. "I assure you Bobbie is a connoisseur: he has an uncanny divination about people. A woman was at the house one day: Bobby looked at her with his curious wide-eyed expression—fortunately *she* did not see him but I saw him out of the corner of my eye;—I am always keeping track of Bobbie out of the corner of my eye even when I seem most absorbed!—then just as she turned towards him, he ran off. After she had gone I asked him why he ran away; I told him it was rude to run away: 'But Bobbie don't like her, muvver," was all he would say. I asked him 'Why' several times and he didn't answer. Finally he said—quite crossly if the truth be told—'O Muvver, how you bovver Bobbie! I don't like her 'cause her insides don't match her outsides!' He hears Fifine talking about matching ribbons and chiffon and he has caught on. Wasn't it clever?"

"I hope I was not the woman," purled Mrs. Winthrop, "because I worship Bobbie."

Grace Barkley gave an inward start at Mrs. Winthrop's unexpected divination.

"You! The idea, Ameda!" she said quickly, trying to cover her tracks. "He calls you the



'booful jungle lady.' The first time he saw you you were carrying your large muff with the head and tails and it perfectly fascinated him: he often asks me if you know 'Mowgli.' But, enough of Bobbie!—Ameda, that Vivian girl is here again visiting the Vintons. She has her eye on Pelham, I *know* she has; I shouldn't be surprised to hear of an engagement."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Winthrop. "They are devoted, and the Vintons are crazy about her: she is evidently a shrewd girl: Pelham is fabulously rich with his two great fortunes! He has one from his grandmother, you know, and one from his aunt, and then he will have his share of his father's wealth."

"And, incidentally," remarked Mrs. Barkley, "he is a charming, a perfectly delightful fellow."

Mrs. Winthrop gave a sympathetic sigh:

"Poor Sally!"

John looked up hastily:

"I should think that would be the very *last* adjective to apply to Miss Sally—ever."

Mrs. Winthrop gave John a searching look:

"Any girl who sees another girl take the man she loves away from her is to be pitied."

"How absurd!" broke in Mrs. Barkley: "Sally in love? She is as free-hearted and as free-footed as Diana. I always call her Diana."

"You may call her what you please, but I know she wanted Pelham. Apart from her love, marriage with him would have been an excellent thing

for Sally, because she has very little money—how she dresses as she does on her pittance I am sure I do not know! Poor Sally!"

John's defence of Sally's dignity had irritated Mrs. Winthrop; for that reason she repeated the phrase.

"I still protest against that adjective, Mrs. Winthrop," persisted John, nothing daunted: "If Miss Sally were heart-broken—which I cannot imagine—and entirely destitute I should not, even then, call her 'poor.' "

"Indeed? Why?"

"Because she is *herself!*"

"What time is it, John?" said Mrs. Barkley suddenly. John looked at his watch.

"Five-thirty."

"Five-thirty? *Not really?* I must go. Good-bye, Ameda. Sorry you are not going."

John said that he must also hasten to keep an appointment. John and Mrs. Barkley left the house together. After they had gone Mrs. Winthrop sat down before her tea table: for a long while she sat there: then she rose, took the violets from the jade bowl, and with ruthless hand threw them into the smouldering fire and watched them burn. When Horace came in, she smiled sweetly in welcome and made him a fresh cup of tea.



CHAPTER XIV

THE Metropolitan Opera House was dazzling with light, bright with fair women blazing with jewels, packed to its capacity.

John's glance swept over the brilliant circle. A sense of pride waxed within him. Deep down in his heart he knew that this pride did not come from his best self—he knew that that which stirred his pride did not really count in the ultimate analysis of life: and in the remote recesses of his soul there was a small voice that—had he allowed it to speak—would have protested he had not earned a fitting cause for pride. He did not often hear that voice in these whirling days: and the buzzing voices he did hear applauded the things that caused his petty pride in outward things, and so it thrived and waxed fat. John knew, with quick perception, that the most brilliant women in that glittering house would feel themselves flattered if he granted them a moment of his presence in their boxes: he knew that the ambitious mammas and doughty dowagers cast envious glances at him: and that many fair women, arrayed in splendour, cast envious glances at the women in his box. He knew, also, that these women, whom they envied, were two of the most notable women in New York

—the most popular, the most discussed: Mrs. de Lancey, with her millions that matched his own, with her wonderful clothes and lavish extravagance, and the incomparable Mrs. Winthrop.

For the past month he had seen Mrs. Winthrop almost daily. The men at the Club said that Wright was "a clever devil and knew a good thing when he saw it." Horace Winthrop said nothing. He thanked his stars that Ameda had a new fad to fill her hours: it left him free and unhampered. The only thing that awakened a keen interest in Horace Winthrop's languid elegance was his pride in his possessions: Ameda, his wife, was his most artistic, his most costly possession: merely as one of his assets, he desired to keep her at her best, charmed and charming, and nothing accomplished this so quickly as a new man: when she was tired of the new man she always sought shelter again with Horace for a brief space: he was an harbour into which she sailed for repairs—to him she went to plume and preen herself for new ventures: Horace acknowledged that this affair with John Wright seemed to be more serious than any other had ever been; but at the same time Ameda had not been so gracious and charming since the early days of their marriage: he knew Wright was a decent fellow, honourable and high-toned, so what difference did a little sentiment make more or less? It amused Ameda and it left him free.

The women said that Ameda Winthrop had handled her cards well, but that she must be on



her guard, because John was difficult to catch and he would be more difficult to keep.

As they had all recognised the baffling remoteness in John when he looked at the picture the night of the dinner, so in the midst of the brilliant life, which John seemed to enjoy with such keen zest, from time to time they recognised a fleeting withdrawal, a baffling reserve that they could neither analyse nor understand: it added to his fascination precisely as it mystified them.

But less and less, as time went on, did Ameda Winthrop see this reserve. There was in her atmosphere a lotus quality that lulled live things to sleep: the more John saw of Ameda Winthrop the less frequently those moments of withdrawal returned to him.

Horace Winthrop, who detested music, always had an engagement at the Club on Opera nights, and Mrs. Winthrop when asked to the Opera first assured herself that the party had been carefully selected and then she consented, with apparent reluctance, to go without her husband.

"Poor Horace, how much he misses and how much we shall miss him," she always said as she made her entrance, before she gave herself up to the hour—and forgot Horace.

To-night, John had managed to keep the seat behind Ameda for himself: he moved away during the entr'actes for the other men who came in to buzz around the women. Now, the house was

dark, once more, and John was back again in his place as the curtain rose on the second act.

It is night—Isolda is standing in the forest, waiting and watching for her lover: the music rises and swells: Tristan draws near; to the undulating rhythm of the music Isolda waves her fleecy scarf which seems endowed with emotion and with life—faster she moves it, faster and faster: the music throbs in great waves of expectancy: passion, poignant pain, longing, desire, the inexorableness of Fate, the sharp sting of Death, the outsoaring of all mortal sense, the everlastingness of Love—all vibrate in the harmony. Her hero comes! Tristan and Isolda rush together—as though by some law that cannot be denied nor disobeyed: they are in each other's arms and about them is the silence and the mystery of the sheltering night: Brangäne stands upon the rampart and sings her watch-song: the lovers murmur to each other's lips: they know not if it be night or day, 'for deep in the bosom' of each 'shines the sun.'

John has always maintained that "Tristan and Isolda" is not only the greatest, but that it is, in the final analysis, the *least sensuous* of all Wagner's Operas. When abroad with a College chum he had seen it first, and they had discussed the ethics of the music-drama far into the night: his chum had maintained that "Tristan and Isolda" is a dangerous drama of sense, the presentation, the apotheosis of carnal passion: John, on



the contrary, with his ardent young idealism, had contended that it is the very opposite; he had claimed that the passion portrayed is a passion of *the soul*—the sensuousness is a sensuousness, not of the flesh, but of that psychic side of life which triumphs over the flesh—transmuting it into something powerful and dynamic. He maintained with eloquence and heat that love, which could, in the moment of rapturous consummation, reach out for death—seeking its exaltation in freedom from the body—that, in the circle of physical ecstasy, could desire the sword to emancipate the soul—*was not carnal:* and that any drama which made its hero and heroine sing the same song of poignant passion when dissolution and despair chilled their senses, which they had sung in the full tide of youth's desire and delight in bliss, was a drama which revealed high triumph over earthly passion.

John knows his theory is correct: back somewhere in his soul it still holds sway: but to-night his arguments are silenced, the engine of his mind has ceased to work, his thoughts are drugged, his dearly-held theory is forgotten: to-night, he knows only the physically sensuous side of the music: to-night, he knows only the call of man's desire—dominating, compelling: the physical currents in his frame surge and resurge.

"Isolda"—"Isolda"—"Isolda"—Tristan sang in passionate refrain. John found himself fitting another name to the music—a name that had

become a *motif* in his thoughts these latter days: the rhythm of the name beat to the rhythm of the song. As if her subconscious self had heard the unspoken call, Ameda Winthrop turned—and to the music John murmured—"Ameda—Ameda!"

Ameda lifted her voluptuous eyelids: an answering flame in her eyes met the fire in his: the swift fire, devastating, consuming, swept through his veins and burned hot in his pulses; and still they gazed and gazed—these two—to the surging of the music: outwardly they sat with exquisite circumspection—for they were in the great Opera House filled with watching eyes—but in their thoughts they were not circumspect.

The scene ended, the curtain fell, the lights flashed: John turned away—the going, however, was only a closer coming. Does he love her? No! He knows he does not love her as he can love: he does not love her as he will one day know love—but what of that? he asks himself—he desires her—every pulse of his being desires her. When the Opera was ended and the good-nights were being said—amidst the chatter and the talk about them, he asked:

"Will you be at home to-morrow, at five, Mrs. Winthrop?"

"To you"—she answered very low—"to you, and to you only."

As he started to move away and let another take his place, Mrs. Winthrop, under cover of the talk, added a word that leaped like wild madness



through his being: she was putting on her royal purple cloak, her sea-green eyes were veiled: she breathed rather than spoke the words—

"I shall expect you to-morrow, at five, Mr. Wright, and—and—Horace goes to Washington in the three o'clock train. Will you stay and have a quiet dinner—and evening—with me?"

"Thank you, Madame," John answered.

Then, once again, they looked into each other's eyes: and in the eyes of each was that which has been the tragedy of life, the bane of history, since man and woman ate of the fruit of the Forbidden Tree.

CHAPTER XV

JOHN'S limousine sped through the crowded streets: it was very late: his pulses were still throbbing madly with the memory of the evening. He did not ask himself what was this new current on which he was drifting—he did not care, he did not want to think: he knew only that his blood was hot within him, that man was man and to him was given the mastery over all desirable things: he felt that dominating sense of power which makes man potentially a tyrant.

Why should he refrain from walking the path that opened before him? He is face to face with a morrow that will contradict what he has always been taught should be the fundamental corner-stone of character, but of old teachings he will not think: he will think instead of the added power that will come to him from self-development—of the fulfilment of his manhood: he will not be a slave to old-fashioned and outworn dogmas and traditions any more than Tristan was when he hurried through the night to the blissful tryst in the forest.

He is John Remington Wright, the world is in his hands, and he will go the way of the world—he will do what any other man, with blood in his veins, would do in his place.



And he must wait seventeen hours! His passion is impatient. To-morrow! He lives it all in anticipation—the long afternoon with its gathering twilight, Ameda at the tea table, gay with badinage—the formal yet intimate little dinner in the superb Winthrop dining-room, he and she alone together—after dinner coffee and cigarettes and a dash of clever talk in the stately library, under the austere chaperonage of the portraits of dead Winthrop ancestors:—then Ameda will say—he can hear the very tones of her voice!—'Let us go up to my boudoir, John; it is so much more cozy and comfortable there.' He sees himself following the graceful figure up the noble staircase to the fragrant boudoir brilliant with frescoes of Eros: he recalls those frescoes, which are notable in New York; Ameda had had a famous French Artist paint them and the Artist had put more than art into the legend that was painted with opulence and splendour. He and she will enter Ameda's room where Eros wings his way upon the wall—and—after that?—he will not allow his mind to go beyond the moment when he enters the room of Eros with the woman he desires.

On and on the limousine sped as John forelived the morrow—the passion-music still surging in his blood, singing in his ears and throbbing through his pulses. A sudden halt and John saw his

stately mansion—solid and palatial in the light of the street lamps.

As he put his latch-key in the door he seemed to move to the *motif* of Isolda: to the remembered echo of the music he entered his magnificent dwelling—

"Don't be skeered, Meester John! It's only me"—the voice came startlingly from the dim recesses of the great hall: it had in it a steadying shock—as a dash of cold water may have for a man who has been drinking heavily. John was giddy with a heady wine that was not of the vine, he was dizzy with an intoxication more perilous than the intoxication from fermented grapes; and the familiar ring of Eben's voice was like an icy plunge to his heat.

"Why, Eben, I'm mighty glad to see you! But for Heaven's sake, why do you do things in such an unexpected way? To loom about in the shadows at this time of night, as though you were a ghost or a burglar, is unsteadying to the nerves! Where's Furniss? Confound him! why did he leave everything so dark?"

John touched a button and the whole place suddenly blazed with electric light. Eben blinked. John held out a cordial hand.

"I hope you have brought your trunk and intend to stay this time—I'm jolly glad to have you here again: Stewart will look after you."

"Can't stay, Meester John; must go back tonight."



"*To-night?* Nonsense! You can't go to-night —why, it's after midnight!"

"What's night to me? Night's just the same as day—the Lord made 'em both. I can catch the train that leaves at two o'clock: an' after I've had my word with you, Meester John, I'll just sit in the hall until it's time to go to the deepo."

"Go back to-night? Not on your life!" protested John. Eben ignored John's words: he began seriously:

"Can you give me a few minutes as late as this, Meester John?"

"Certainly, Eben, as many as you wish; come up to my den. Had anything to eat?"

"Now don't you bother 'bout my eatin' an' sleepin'. I eat on the way here from the deepo —that's to say I went into a place to eat—I see 'Restaurant' writ over the door, an' I heard scrapin' of fiddles inside, so I went in an' eat some—but the sights I saw in that place turned my stomach."

"What were they?" John laughed.

"Now what's the good of yer askin' that? If you've seen 'em, you know 'em—if you ain't, you oughtn't to."

John led the way up-stairs to his luxurious den. Something warm always came into his heart at the sight of Eben. One of the greatest pleasures that he had in his fortune was the being able to make some return to this faithful servant who had stood so loyally beside his mother and his

father, and who had been with him in all the dark hours of his boyhood: Eben had refused to allow him to do what he desired, so he had amused himself by using diplomacy and secrecy to accomplish his ends. He had put the farm, with a large sum of money, in Eben's name—although this Eben did not know: what he did know was that John had well stocked the place with fine cattle and fine poultry and that fact delighted Eben with the impersonal delight of the farmer: he thought John was interested in the matter, which to him was as it should be: but, as time went on, he felt a dull disappointment that John was not more concerned in the results and that he never came to see the old place in its new enterprise. John had kept away from Elmcroft: the very thought of the place was distasteful: the remembrance of Marion made him extremely uncomfortable, in spite of his sophistical protests that there was nothing of which his chivalry need be ashamed. Moreover, John had also a dim apprehension that if Eben were on his own ground in the rugged familiar scenes of Nature, where he was at home and master of the situation, his uncompromising truth and straightforwardness, even his humour, would jar upon the present rôle of John's new life; but here in New York, amidst his own surroundings, it was different—here, Eben was like fresh radishes in the course of a heavy dinner. John had had great amusement in the three or four times that he had succeeded in getting Eben to



visit New York; he confided to Mrs. Winthrop that it was better fun than any vaudeville to hear Eben's comments on New York. John had not, however, been able to succeed in keeping him long in town: Eben had gone off each time, suddenly and unexpectedly, exactly as a cow runs to pasture.

"New York's all very well for 'em as likes it, Meester John," he had said, "but there's so much to see you can't see nothin'—an' so much noise that you can't hear yerself think 'bout what y're seein'."

To-night, John felt a delicious piquancy in the situation: the jump from "Tristan and Isolda" to Eben Hankins delighted his sense of humour. His pulses were throbbing, he did not want to think, he was sure he could not sleep, and talk with Eben would pass the time.

When they were in John's den with the door closed, Eben looked around the luxurious room—at the inlaid desk with its elaborate conveniences, heavy silver and jewel-studded writing articles, the luxurious davenport of crimson leather, the easy smoking-chairs, the soft lights and elegant appurtenances—and gave a homely grunt.

"Ain't much like yer room at the farm, Meester John."

"I should say not," John assented, "and I am not much like the man who used to be in that room."

Eben's keen eyes came back from the room and slowly surveyed John from head to foot.

"That's a fact."

John was conscious of an odd pang of disappointment: he had not expected such ready assent from Eben: notwithstanding his departure from what he knew were Eben's ideas of manhood, he had thought he could count on the faithful man's loyal devotion for partial, if gruff, approval, under all circumstances: now, he felt instinctively that Eben no longer approved of him at all and he found himself desiring, with an eager boyish impetuosity, the old commendation. John had been going with the tide into places and ways very far from his earliest ideals: his conscience had been hushed with sophistry and put to sleep by lotus anodynes. Of a sudden his conscience spoke clear, distinct—asking estimates and apprisals of himself: and it was as if Eben—man of the soil, God's own product of Nature—was a scale by which John felt himself being measured—"Sentiment! rubbish!" John's new self murmured inaudibly to his old self: but even as he said it, a memory-picture, long forgotten, caught him swiftly unawares—strange that it should come to-night of all nights! It was the picture of a woman, frail and shadowy unto death, with sunken eyes that held within them a shining faith; at her knee is standing a little boy, looking up into her face; and like an echo heard across a deep chasm he hears the words—"My little son,



mother wants you always to 'think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well.' "

"Well, Eben,"—John was anxious to break the spell—"'what has brought you here 'at the witching hour of night?' "

"What time's that?"

"That's Keats's word for midnight—but you never could appreciate poetry," and John flashed Eben one of his boyish fascinating smiles.

"Yes, I do. I've got a hull box full to home I cut out from *The Elmcroft Banner,* but poetry's like the cranberry on the turkey—it's all very well for an extry dish, but you wouldn't get fat on it. Poetry's all right when you ain't got nothin' else to do, but it oughtn't to interfere with business."

"Come to business then."

"I've come to see you 'bout a matter an' I thought I'd never get here! Say, Meester John, don't folks in New York never go to bed?"

"Seldom, except in the daytime."

"Land-o'mercy-sakes! In the *daytime?* Go to bed in the daytime? Says I to myself, says I, now if I gets to New York nigh onto midnight, I'll have easy goin' from the deepo to Meester John's —but there wasn't standin' room in the cars nor walkin' room on the walks! Anythin' goin' on to-night?"

"Nothing more than usual—you happened to strike just the time when the theatres were all coming out."

"The theaytres! You don't say. All them folks

at the theaytres? If they do so much play-actin' when do they do their livin'?"

John looked up quickly.

"When, indeed?"

"I stood a spell to watch 'em an' there was so many folks an' they was all in such a hurry, I thought there must be a riot. Don't they never stop?"

"Only to die," John answered sententiously.

"Wal, they have to stop for that, sure 'nuff: I just stood there a spell wonderin' where they was all comin' from an' where they was all goin' to."

"Where do you think they came from, Eben—and where do you think they are going?"

Eben scratched his head, thought a moment, hitched his trousers and then answered as the conclusion to his mental analysis:

"Wal, I know they all *come* from the Lord God Almighty, but I think most of 'em is *goin'* to the devil."

"Right you are, Eben! And now—what do you want?"

"I've come to see you 'bout a matter of business."

"So you said; out with it!"

"I'm tellin' you as fast as I can."

"Do you want some money?"

"Now see here, Meester John, money's money—but there's other things in life besides money."

There was an honest dignity about the man that pleased John.



"I beg your pardon, Eben. How may I serve you?"

" 'Tain't *me* I want you to serve"—there was a moment's pause and in that moment John felt an ominous thrill—"it's Mees Marion."

"Miss Marion! What's the matter with Miss Marion?"

" 'Nuff's the matter with her," said Eben. "First off, the Parson's dead."

"Dead? Dr. Meredith?"

"Yes, an' what we're goin' to do without him, the Lord only knows. But," Eben continued after a pause, "as long as the Lord knows, I guess we'll get on."

"Dr. Meredith dead? When did he die? Why wasn't I told?—Why didn't you write and tell me?" John repeated, as Eben made no answer.

"Wal," Eben spoke hesitatingly, "I didn't want to interrupt you. It seems like you'd kind'er forgotten Elmcroft, that's to say, not forgotten exactly, but was kind'er indeeferent like 'bout what's happenin' there."

"Nonsense!" John's contradiction was the sharper because he realised the truth of the charge. "I have been too busy to make a moment to run down before—couldn't possibly—but I was going *surely* this spring. I should have come at once, however, to see Dr. Meredith if you had told me he was ill. You should have written to me, Eben: you did very wrong."

Eben looked troubled.

"I most generally do do wrong 'bout the things I most want to do right 'bout."

"Dear old Dr. Meredith!" said John. "I owe him a lot. Was he ill long? Did he suffer?"

"Yes; he was sick five months, but he wouldn't give up. He preached when he looked like a windin' sheet."

"How splendid! That's like him!"

A throb of admiration warmed John: it came from the enthusiasm that, in his boyhood, had made him an ardent hero-worshipper: this enthusiasm had been choked of late by the overlay of a material stratum.

In that throb of boyish enthusiasm John seemed more like his old self than Eben had seen him since he left Elmcroft.

Eben looked hard at him for a moment and then drew a breath as of relief and said irrelevantly but conclusively:

"I reckon I did right to come, after all."

"Of course you did!" said John, realising that up to this moment Eben had had his doubts. "Now tell me about Miss Marion—where is she, poor child?"

"You hit it there—she's 'poor child' all right—she lived by her father—an' now he's gone she ain't got nobody."

"How is she?"

"She's been ailin' for two years—lookin' kind o' peeked-like, an' more like a white rose than the pink ones she sets such store by—but she stuck



by her father an' took good care of him. I saw a lot when I was there: you've done a good deed in easin' me up the way you have by havin' more men on the farm—it's give me such lashions of time that I've been able to help a bit where I was needed, an' I was needed at the Parsonage; I was there consid'able, helpin' 'bout. I know'd she was sick—for I see her layin' down in the woods—when she didn't think no one saw her —as though her head ached somethin' bad—but as soon as she come in to her father she'd look up an' smile just as cheerful as a robin; you know that smile of her'n—the smile that shines in her eyes when it comes on her mouth."

Ah!—that was it! John had been trying to determine for a year just what it was that he missed from Mrs. Winthrop's alluring smile: he knew now it was the smile in her eyes when her lips were curving.

The picture of Marion with the radiance of eyes as well as the radiance of lips rose before him. It was as though a traveller who had wandered deep into the market-places and the exchanges of the world had caught a fleeting vision of a remembered nymph in a far-off unforgotten grove.

"Has she left the Parsonage?" John searched for questions that would promptly give him the situation.

"Left the Parsonage! Wal, now, where's the new meenister to live if she ain't? 'Twas all

right so long as she was at the Parsonage she was to home—but last month she had to git out 'cause the new Parson come. I don't want to say nothin' disrespectful 'bout that there young man 'cause he's a meenister of the Lord—but his wife ain't no meenister of the Lord's an' I take great consolation in sayin' that she's a fool: it takes a stout stomach to see them two—the Rev'd Johnson an' his fool wife in the old parsonage where Dr. Meredith has been for nigh on to thirty years."

"I should think it would!" said John sympathetically. "Where is Miss Marion?"

"With that crotchety old Smith woman."

"Smith woman?"

"Yes, the dressmaker—I reckon you've forgot—she lives on the Main Street—she's as sharp as a fish hook an' as sour as vinegar."

"And Miss Marion is with her? That must not be," said John impulsively. "What can be done?"

"If I'd know'd, I wouldn't 'av come."

The instinct of loyalty arose in John. It was all very well to forget the passing mood of a May romance—but it was another thing to forget your childhood's friend—when she was in trouble: the daughter of your old teacher—your mother's truest and best friend.

"What may I do, Eben?"

"Now what's the use of all them piles an' piles of books if they can't tell you what to do when you don't know?"



"Is the church doing anything for her?"

" 'Course the church won't let her starve; but that ain't all—what Mees Marion needs is a friend; som'un to advise her, som'un as knows somethin' of the world, like you do: the old women with rumatiz drink tea an' the old elders with paralysis chew tobacco an' that's 'bout all they know—an' the present generation of Elmcroft fool young men ain't smart 'nuff to see how deeferent Mees Marion is from the rest of the world: an' I don't like them summer folks that comes down—'cause *they do* see how deeferent she is an'—an'——"

"And what?" asked John.

"Wal, never mind! 'Twas all right when her father was there, but now she's alone an' fired out of the Parsonage, I'm kind of skeered! You know Mees Marion's mighty high-headed, ain't afeared of nobody, an' I think it ain't good for her to be alone, especially as her ailin' ain't hurt her looks: she's got better lookin' every day! She's just like corn to the crows to those men: I'm worried 'bout her all the time—first I'm 'feared she'll die—an' next I'm 'feared she won't."

"You say she grows more beautiful?" John could not resist putting the question.

"Wal, I don't know what you call it—but she makes you feel more cockled up inside: when she'd come dancin' 'round couple o' years ago I al'ays wanted to laugh—I felt like I feel on a sunshiny

mornin'—but now when she comes 'round I feel like I feel when they sing 'Nearer, my God, to Thee' in church."

A strange rush of memory and of emotion swept over John; he rose, laid his hand affectionately on Eben's shoulder.

"Eben, I wish I were as good as you are."

"Don't say that. I ain't good nohow—I'm 'bout the worst man I ever know'd anywhere—the devil himself would be proud of my temper when it's riz."

John thrust his hands into his pockets and began striding up and down the room: he was seized by an overpowering impulse—it moved him, it compelled him: he could not define it—he could not resist it.

"Eben—" John halted in his stride—he spoke quickly, as though he were uttering words which must be said at once before anything should prevent them from being said, "Eben, I will go down to Elmcroft to-morrow."

"Wal," said Eben gruffly, "I'd feel easier."

"But—" John hesitated, "perhaps Miss Marion won't see me."

"Won't see you?" Eben's voice betrayed complete surprise.

John felt a certain sense of comfort in noting that surprise—evidently Eben did not suspect.

"No—I don't think Miss Marion likes me very well."

Eben thought a moment:



"Wal, I guess she likes you all right, 'cause she al'ays says y're her oldest friend an' she says that when you was to home you was her best friend."

"Does she? Does she really? That is gracious of her."

"She's gracious all right,—if you mean by gracious the thing that makes you feel the way flowers smell."

"Good,—that's a bully description of graciousness. I have an important engagement, to-morrow"—John caught his breath—"but—but I can —yes, I WILL postpone it. I'll go down in the noon train—and you'll put me up for the night."

"Sure." Eben's gruff response betrayed not the slightest indication of the warming it gave his honest heart to think of having John at the farm for a night.

"You will wait and go back with me, Eben?"

"Couldn't, Meester John, I must go down an' rid up a bit an' get yer room ready."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. I'll take things just as they are. You wait over and go down with me—I want you to."

"Don't ask me to stay here, please don't, Meester John—I don't see much deeference 'tween New York an' Hell, honest I don't!"

John laughed.

"Oh, come off, Eben! You're too hard on us."

Eben made an awkward movement, an attempt at apology:

"I don't mean nothin' to you, Meester John; when I'm in this house, it's all very decent—but I can't help rememberin' *what's just 'round the corner!* You know when I was here afore you had some of them new-fangled men of yourn show me the town—wal, I seen it—an' I want to go home! When I *have* to come, I *come*—but soon as my say is said, I want to quit."

"All right, Eben, have your own way. See you to-morrow night at the farm. Is there anything I can do for you before I go?"

"No, thank ye."

"Then, I'm off to bed. When you go out, slam the front door behind you; it locks itself."

"I know it, Meester John, I've seen it: that's one of the skeery things in this city; things open of theirselves an' lock of theirselves—I'm always skeered of walkin' into a net or a trap: when I'm here I always wisht I was safe in the woods. I'll go down an' sit in the hall until half-past-three," and Eben started for the door.

"No, no, sit here—it's more comfortable." John opened a silver box: "Here are some cigars —help yourself."

"Thank ye, kindly, but I wouldn't smoke one of them high-falutin' cigars for a farm,—my liver'd be all riled up for a week, but if ye don't mind——" and he pulled from his pocket some bad-smelling tobacco and an old pipe.

"No, indeed—smoke away."

John said good night, and was about to go.



"Say, Meester John, please plug off that light thing afore you go?"

"The light thing? Oh! the electric light! But you mustn't sit in darkness—you can turn it off; see, this way!" and John pressed the button.

"No, thank ye! I al'ays let them things alone."

"Eben, you are a hopeless old-fashioned conservative. Don't you ever go down to the Village in Elmcroft?"

"I ain't got no callin' to go nowheres at nighttime 'cept to bed—that is to say—as a reg'lar."

"But there is nothing now except electric light, anywhere—except on your farm."

"*Your* farm, Meester John," corrected Eben.

"Many farms have it even in the stables and barns."

"Yes, I know," Eben said dejectedly; "even the cows an' the bulls an' the chickens are gettin' to be what you might call modern—all 'cept me. We've got a cow that acts just like them militant suffragettes the papers tell about."

"Here, give me your finger," and John held out his hand; "let me show you how this works."

Eben thrust his hands deep down into his pockets.

"No, you don't, Meester John; no, you don't. *You're* use't to it, I ain't."

John began switching the lights on and off in quick succession. Eben watched it as long as he could stand it: finally he cried:

"Stop it, Meester John, stop it—for the land

sakes! I al'ays feel safer, out in the Lord's hands in a good old-fashioned thunder an' lightnin' storm."

John smiled.

"All right then, Eben, you needn't touch it: let it burn all night. Leave it on when you go—good night, see you to-morrow."

When Eben was alone, he looked around the brilliantly lighted room at all the manifestations of luxury—and shook his head.

John went to his palatial bedroom, but sleep was fitful: he heard the emphatic slam of the front door when Eben left—and smiled to himself in the darkness: the cool grey dawn was looking in at the windows when he awoke with a start and jumped up with a sense of an impending crisis hanging over him: after he had hurriedly dressed, he wrote the following note:

"Fate has robbed me of my longed-for hour, Madame—

"I cannot come to you this afternoon. I am deeply sorry: but I must crave your pardon: I have been suddenly called out of town by peremptory business.

"Let the roses speak my regret, my disappointment, and my homage.

"Faithfully, JOHN REMINGTON WRIGHT."

Then he gave an extravagant order for the most magnificent American Beauty roses in town to be sent to Mrs. Winthrop with the note.



CHAPTER XVI

An hour later John was rushing through the dreary country in a stuffy railroad car, intensely irritated at the inward compulsion which drew him to Elmcroft in spite of himself, and critically analytical of a curious half sense of *escape* which kept pace with the feeling of irritation. The whir of the wheels of the train seemed to reiterate the echo of Matthew Arnold's words which had come to his remembrance last night,—"Think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well."

Ah! what did it mean to "think clear"? Had his thoughts been such that he would have opened the door for his mother to enter and read those thoughts with her pure eyes?—"Feel deep"—Had he felt deep? No, he had really not *felt* at all—he had been drifting on the surface of sense and of sensation: there had been no depth to his feeling—his thoughts—his life for two years. "Bear fruit well."—What fruit was he bearing? —None: he had ceased to bear, to create, to produce, to work, even in farmlike ways: he had ceased studying—he did not even read seriously —he was drifting on the current of lazy luxury and intoxicating self-indulgence. Where were the fruits of his seed-sowing—where was the har-

vest from his planting—where was the accomplishment from his own work? He was bearing nothing: he was eating the fruit of a dead man's labours from the hands of a dead man.

That fine old scholar, Dr. Meredith, whose life had been one long sacrifice, had worked until the end—he had gone down into the dark Valley of the Shadow still working and leaving fruit to spring up in the hearts of true men like Eben: and he—John Remington Wright—was a drone in the vast activities of an evolving world: he was a tramp, a moneyed, well-dressed, envied tramp, to be sure, but nothing more nor less than a tramp, he was an idler—a grinding, busy idler, but as far as accomplishment went he was an idler. How uncomfortable it was that this poignant thought should take possession of him at the very height of his worldly success and at the crisis of his worldly career! Why could not the traditions of his life, which had been lulled to sleep, as it were, by benumbing drugs, have remained comfortably inert? Why should he be roused, now, to introspection and to morbid self-analysis? Last night at the Opera all had been so bright and exhilarating—and now to-day he had an unpleasant sensation which he could not shake off, which was very uncomfortable. It was this confounded journey! The very topography of the country brought back to him associations of ideas. Almost he was tempted to stop at the *junction* and take the express train back to New



York: something, however, like a physical force drew him on: the journey sped: he asked himself questions to contradict them: he put before himself possibilities to annihilate them: he caught momentary vistas of things he could not frame into words, and instantly he closed the window of his mind, declaring that the vista was an old-fashioned outworn dream.

When he reached the farm, the commonplaceness of the old house rose crude and ugly to confront him: it looked unusually desolate in the March dreariness. The mere creature comforts of his daily existence, his bath-room with its luxurious appointments, and his other conveniences. had quickly grown to be necessities; his luxurious surroundings and all the sumptuous details of his environment had become his natural atmosphere; and the threadbare carpets, the battered furniture in the little farm house—which Eben would not allow him to change—the unloveliness of it all in the old days had always grated on his artistic sense, and now that that sense was habituated to satisfaction, it jarred upon him with a sharper distaste. Yet, through it all, there was a curious subconscious feeling of being at home, a refreshing ease to the restlessness which he had felt on the trip.

As he stood upon the porch and looked out over the wide free landscape, he was conscious of being in larger spaces, both physically and mentally, than he had known for some time. The beautiful

steadfast hills, still snow-covered, cutting into the azure sky, gave him an indefinable feeling of something lofty, suddenly found, which for awhile had been lost. He ate the dinner Eben had had prepared for him, of ham and eggs, light biscuit and incomparable butter, with a relish that he did not often have for his caviare and truffles.

"This is a bully dinner, Eben. I'm hungry—and I'm thirsty, too: I should like a little whiskey."

Eben's face fell.

"Whiskey, Meester John? Are you sick?"

"Not at all, but I take whiskey with my dinner, sometimes."

"You don't say!"

John smiled indulgently.

"Yes, have you any objections?"

" 'Tain't for me to have no objections. If you like that sort of thing that's the sort of thing you like."

"Don't you like it?"

"Me? No."

"Well, get me some, please."

Eben's face was a puckered wrinkle of anxiety.

"I'm awful sorry, Meester John. I wish I'd know'd, I'd of had a hull dimyjon, but there ain't a drop in the house."

"All right. Don't bother," said John pleasantly; "it doesn't make the slightest difference. I'll send you a stock next week."

"Thank ye, kindly, Meester John, but I've lots



of money since you made me take that extra riz an' I can always get it when you come an' I don't want none no other time."

"Don't you approve of it?"

" 'Tain't for me to approve or disapprove of nothin'. I don't like it, I don't take it, an' I don't want it."

"What do you drink?"

"I drink the water that comes down from the hills."

"So do I," laughed John, "but I put whiskey in it."

Eben shook his head:

"Whiskey muddles the head an' my head's all I've got to think with."

"I'll send you some fine old whiskey," John teased; "you ought to have it on hand in case you are ill."

"No, thank ye: if I'm sick I want to die sober —I don't want to meet the Lord God Almighty with a thick tongue an' a muddled brain."

"All right, here's to you," and John drained a glass of sparkling spring water.

"This *is* delicious, Eben."

"Best water anywheres 'bout," said Eben proudly: "Do you mind you, Meester John, of the old spring?"

"Down at the Northwest corner of the big field? I should say I did!"

John little knew the delight he had given the grim old farmer by his loyalty to memory.

"Eben, I'll tell you what! We'll put a ram there to bring the water up to the house."

"Don't you never do it, Meester John! Don't you never do it—she might stop!"

"Nonsense, Eben! It would save you a lot of trouble in carrying up the water."

" 'Tain't nonsense. I know too much 'bout springs—a spring's like a woman—she'll keep on givin' an' givin' an' givin' year in an' year out, but she won't stand no foolin' nor no forcin': the spring's al'ays runnin' free an' plenty down in the big field but if you try to force her up to the house she might git mad an' run off. I've know'd it to happen afore."

"All right, Eben, I won't interfere with your lady friend: no coercion for her!"

After luncheon Eben brought his ledger to John.

"Say, Meester John, have you got time to look over them accounts?"

"Bother the accounts! I wish you would take more money for yourself."

"But I don't never take no money I ain't earned."

"I know it, confound you!"

"That's to say, I live here, an' I ain't earned that, but I am only here tempery like: when I'm too old to work, then I'll quit."

"Live here!—Why, Thunder and Mars! you *belong* here—the *farm is yours!*"

"You call it so, an' I thank ye kindly, but—I go on callin' it yourn."



John caught sight of a paper upon the table: "*The Elmcroft Banner,* as I am alive!" he cried: "I haven't seen it for two years. Do you still read that stuff, Eben?"

"You better believe I read it. How could I know what's what if I didn't?"

"Why, I ordered *The New York Times* sent to you regularly. That's the paper to tell you what's what. Don't you read that?"

"Yes, thank ye kindly, I read it." Eben's tone was non-committal.

"What do you think of it?"

"Wal, for a paper that ain't no good nohow it's better'n it might be if 'twas worse."

"Oh, I should have ordered *The Tribune* for you. I'll do so as soon as I go back."

"Don't you do it, Meester John. I'd rather have a plain country paper as tries to fly high like *The Banner* than a high-flyin' city paper as tries to talk plain like *The Tribune.*"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said John good-humouredly, "I'll send you both *The Times* and *The Tribune;* they will neutralise each other. I forgot your dreadful Republican principles: you haven't changed yet, I see."

"You don't s'pose I'd change me skin, do you? A man don't change his party no more'n he changes his skin."

"Oh, come off! a lot of your G. O. P.'s have changed."

"That's so," replied Eben, scornfully: "some

of 'em call 'emselves Bull Mooses but they'll come back all right. The elephant's a patient critter."

"What did you say last year when the Democrats came in?"

"What'd I say? I didn't say nothin'. I was so mad I couldn't even spit."

"I see you haven't any more sympathy for the Democrats than you used to have."

"I'll tell you how 'tis, Meester John. The Democrats are all right so long's nothin's doin' but when somethin's doin' they don't do nothin'."

"*Eben!* I am a Democrat, if you please! Have you forgotten *that?*"

"No, I ain't!" Eben's voice was disconsolate: "I don't never forgit—wisht I could. I remember it in me prayers every night."

"You just wait," said John, "and see what the Democrats will do in the next three years."

"Wal, I'm awaitin' watchful."

"By the way, Eben, what do you say about our Mexican policy?"

"What do I say—what do I say? Look a-here, Meester John, I'm a member of the church in good an' reg'lar standin' an' I guess it's best for my standin' not to say what I think 'bout it."

At this moment, little fat-cheeked Jimmy pushed open the door and obtruded a tousled head in a red worsted cap: he was the son of one of Eben's hired men; John had sent him on an important errand before luncheon.

"Here's your answer, Mister," he said.



John held out one hand whilst the other found a coin for the boy which nearly took his breath away. John was amazed at the eagerness with which he broke the seal and the pleasure he felt at sight of the well-remembered handwriting, the handwriting so indicative of character—straightforward, clear, with firm straight lines and artistic curves.

"DEAR JOHN," he read:

"It will give me pleasure to see you again. You are associated with Father and with the far-off happy days of childhood in my old home. How long ago those days seem! How far we have gone from that happy play time! You were Father's favourite pupil—the son of his dearest friend: I never forget that.

"I shall be glad to talk with you of him: because, although they love him devotedly in Elmcroft, there are very few here who understand how truly great is the man they love.

"I remember your admiration for his intellect and your appreciation of him in those old days and I am glad to see, from your note, that you, also, remember with gratitude what he did for you. You are right, it is a wonderful gift to have had his training, mental and spiritual.

"I will be at home at four o'clock. Welcome waits for you.

"Sincerely yours,

"MARION MEREDITH."

John folded the note with an expression of relief. After all she was not lacking in tact, this country girl! She intended to ignore the crisis of that May-time, and they would meet in the old comradeship of their childhood: he kept his mind away from the remembrance that he wanted to forget, and fastened it upon the romps, the tumbles, the nutting, the sledding, and the skating-parties, of those glad days of childhood: and mostly on the hours when he and Marion had listened to his mother's stories—those wonderful stories at which they wept and laughed together.

At three-thirty he started for the village: on his way he met two or three of his old comrades, and their deference to him partly amused and partly irritated him: John's nature was made of many moods.

The tiny house was on the Main Street; an elaborately painted sign, on the front door, stated that Miss Smith made dresses in the latest fashion. Miss Smith opened the door with effusion.

"Well, now, I'm proud to see you in my humble home; just step right in the parlour, and I'll call Miss Marion—she'll be down in a minute."

John greeted Miss Smith with a cordiality which made her proud, and went into the little stuffy room filled with wax flowers, photographs and chromos. It had a new set of furniture which Miss Smith had recently bought with her scanty earnings at a clearing-out sale: the formation of the tortuous chairs delighted her heart; that they



were composed of most back-breaking inequalities, and covered with colours which swore violently at each other, did not trouble her.

Miss Smith left the room: John heard her feet pattering down the hall; in a few moments he heard them pause, then come pattering back again; she opened the door:

"Mr. Wright, will you think me very bold if I ask you a question? I don't mean to be inquisitive, but me and Amelia Brown have been arguing over the matter. How many rooms have you got in your new house?"

"How many rooms?" John asked, amused. "Really, I don't know; I never counted."

"Don't know! *don't know* how many rooms you've got in *your own* house? Never counted the rooms in *your own* house?"

Miss Smith's attitude conveyed distrust and doubt: he felt called upon to redeem himself: he made a quick calculation—

"I should say——"

"Counting the kitchen," broke in Miss Smith.

"I should say—about fifty-seven—counting the kitchen."

"Fifty-seven! Land-o'mercy-sakes! Fifty-seven!—then Amelia Brown was *just* as wrong as me!"

To his great relief she went: once again he heard the pattering of her feet along the hall and this time he heard them patter up the little stairs at the end of it.

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN went to the window—the sun was shining on the lingering down-trodden snow: he looked up the Village street, and memories awoke: that old Village street! with its long line of graceful naked elm trees on either side arching across the broad road: he knew every turn, every curve of it: recollections of boyish pranks came back to him—and in every adventure there was the flashing vivid picture of Marion. He did not know how long he had stood there when a voice that held in it unforgettable cadences, the poignant quality which goes straight to the heart, said quietly—

"Good afternoon, John."

He turned and saw Marion standing in the doorway—not the gay mischievous Marion he had been seeing in memory but the Marion of later days, now sorrow-touched and infinitely more lovely. The light of the sun fell upon her: she stood straight and fragile as a lily. There was an indefinable quality about her—a haunting sweetness that was perilously like pathos—and yet was very far from pathos. One could see that she had looked into the eyes of sorrow—but one



could also see that she had looked beyond sorrow. Her shining hair was simply twisted about her small head—she was dressed in a black woollen dress—absolutely plain and severe; a white lawn collar, turned back, showed the curves of her throat—there was not a trace of ornament about her. Suddenly "A bolt was shot back somewhere" in John's breast, and "A lost pulse of feeling stirred again." Marion came forward with outstretched hand, she had the ease of an empress: the ugly little room might have been a throne-room for the manner of her greeting, and yet it might have been a woodland nursery for its childlike naturalness and unaffected simplicity.

"It is very nice to see you again, John—Father"—there was a break in her voice at the word Father—"was always very fond of you."

Once more she had struck the right note for his comfort and for her own dignity: she had chosen to ignore the fuller personal memories that lay between them and had gone to that pleasant ground of childhood interests. John took her hand and looked down upon her: his heart swelled within him: a great tenderness surged toward this lonely bereft girl—the friend of his boyhood—the daughter of the man he respected above all other men—a tenderness that had a beneficent effect upon his own heart.

"How much I owe that noble man—your Father!"

The colour came to her cheeks, a light came into her eyes. John, also, had said the right thing.

"Father was noble—he *is* noble—that is one thing I cannot do, I *cannot* use the past tense about Father."

"No, of course you cannot, why should you?"

"He is always beside me," Marion continued, "and it gives me strength for—" again the poignant note in her voice—"for everything."

A new emotion swept over John; very tenderly he spoke:

"May I ask you to tell me something about him —all that you are willing to share?"

Simply she told the story of her father's death.

"I used to doubt God, sometimes——" she ended.

"You?" he interrupted, surprised.

"Yes, sometimes, when I read certain books and after I had talked with certain persons." John wondered with a haunting self-reproach if he were one of the certain persons. "But now," she looked like a white flame, "I shall never doubt God any more—I *have seen Father die.*"

John felt a desire to kneel. There was silence in the room for a few moments—and then he said persuasively:

"And may I ask you about yourself?"

"There is nothing to tell about me."

"There must be much to tell. Remember, I am your oldest friend; we were children together. I



have come down here especially to know how you are, who is taking care of you, and—if I may presume to ask—something of your future."

"Let me see—there are three things," a touch of her old spirit flashed forth—"How am I? Where am I? And whither am I? First, I am very well and I am strong: I could pick up this house with my right hand and move it wherever you say."

"That convinces me that you are ill—ill and feverish!"

"How very discouraging!" Marion smiled: "We always argued—you and I, when we were children—Oh, dear! It has begun again."

"No, but seriously, Marion, I don't like the look in your face: you ought to see a doctor; you are too fragile."

"How very uncomplimentary you are: you are as bad as Miss Smith—she says I am as 'white as a peeled onion.'"

"I don't like your moving houses around."

Marion's silvery laugh rang musically, at last. John suddenly realised that he had been eagerly waiting and watching for it.

"Don't be alarmed, I won't disturb the Village. Really and truly, Doctor Wright, I am very well—only tired, naturally. Now, for the second thing." She counted on her fingers: John watched her expressive hands:

"Who is taking care of me?—Good, kind Miss Smith: she would lay down her life for me—be-

cause I am Father's child: when I demur at the trouble she takes to give me everything I want——"

"Everything you want——?" John looked about the room and groaned inaudibly.

"She always tells me," Marion continued, "that Dr. Meredith saved her from death in this life and death in the life to come—think of it—as if there *could* be death in the life to come! 'It's little enough,' she says, 'to do for his daughter.' Moreover—" Marion looked up with the unconscious archness that had always fascinated John in the old days—"I *think* she likes me a little bit for my own self."

"Rather!" John assented emphatically.

"And now the third question—" said Marion, laying her third finger in the palm of her left hand—"My future?—*That* is veiled in mist! Doesn't it sound exciting? It is really quite thrilling not to know what destiny lies before one: everything is a surprise! My future may be the vast enterprise of hat-trimming: I am considering going into business with Miss Smith and having a branch office here. I have an original inspiration!—that is to combine the two momentous Realities of life—gowns and hats: it would simplify living by saving time. Now, all a woman's mental and physical forces are summoned to face the great problem of the universe —what she shall wear: she spends hours at her dressmaker's and then turns to some little aside



—like Church work or Social Settlement work or some incidental of that kind—and then, *just* as she gets started on her work, she has to go off again on the problem of hats. But if it could all be in one house, and under one scheme—one great architectural plan, so to speak, it would be a time-saver."

"Excellent!" John entered into the persiflage with enthusiasm—"Excellent! I call that a most far-seeing enterprise: you combine the genius of an artist with the practicality of a financier."

"If I can't endure millinery—and I'll admit it has its limitations—I may go into the office of William Bristo, Attorney at Law: he offered me the large and munificent sum of six dollars a week if I would write his letters."

"Will Bristo? Heavens!"

Marion nodded her head:

"I quite agree with you! But, as Eben says, 'When all fruit fails, welcome haws'—Mr. Bristo, at least, appreciates my executive ability, and that is most sustaining. The old ladies of the Congregation think I am well-meaning, but helpless: they think I am ornamental but useless. It was balm to my pride when Will Bristo paid me the high compliment of saying that I wrote faster than he did—and you know Will Bristo is a very rapid young man!"

They both laughed in the spontaneous old-time way, remembering the lazy snaillike methods of Will Bristo.

"So you see my future is entirely secure—though uncertain—so many vocations open and call! There was a nice old lady who wanted me for a companion—but I did not choose to narrow my life into a groove. I thought I'd prefer to keep to the larger career."

This nonsense, born of a lofty spirit, stirred John to admiration, even to enthusiasm: he thought of the badinage of women of the world whose shibboleth is poise, and he wondered how many of them would have played the game as this girl played it, if they had been swept bare of every earthly support and had been cast out, *alone* in the cold and barren world, compelled to earn their own livelihood by the work of their hands.

John and Marion talked naturally and delightfully for an hour. John felt more and more as they talked that he was a boy again. The feeling of being a boy comes perennially to every nature that is fundamentally honest, true and alive: and it brings the renewal of life as nothing else does: John had lost it for a time in the fevered exotic pleasures of New York: but it flowed with incoming tide into all the recesses of his being. The consciousness of his vast wealth, his magnificent house, his box at the opera, his luxurious clubs, and his feverish rush of social pleasures was overswept by a cool fresh bath of boyish renewal. During the hour there had many times risen to his remembrance the old question that he had once asked himself by day and by night—"Is she



delicious because she is Marion, or is she delicious because she is woman?" At last he could answer it! He had seen the other women, he had a standard of comparison: he could judge, beyond a peradventure he knew that she was delicious because she was Marion. Her hair was uncoiffed, her skin was fresh and unpowdered, her dress was unadorned: she had no material accessories to frame her nor to enshrine her: she was only herself—and yet she charmed him by her unequalled personality: she fascinated him as the subtle indescribable Spring fascinates the feverish and the city-bound. She gave him the excitement of watching for the unexpected. He could determine, almost to a nicety, what the women in New York would do under any given circumstance, but one could never know what Marion would do or say: this gave sharp zest, stimulating exhilaration to her companionship.

John had found the time full of many-sided delights! And there was also a growing *at-homeness:* if there had been any inward embarrassment in their meeting—to him and to Marion—it had quickly worn off: an enthusiasm of common interests and memories waxed with the moments.

There is no meeting-ground more calculated to break down the barriers and to banish embarrassment than the meeting-ground of a memory of childhood spent together.

"Do you remember this?"—"Ah! yes, and do you remember that?"—creates a warm atmos-

phere that makes one feel at home. Suddenly, Marion turned in her frank, straightforward way—

"It has been delightful to talk with you, John! It makes me feel like a little girl again." She gave a sigh: "I am so tired of being a Pillar of the Church—the Example for the Town—as Dr. Meredith's daughter is expected to be."

"*You* the Example for the Town!" John answered, amused. "Why, it was only yesterday you were called 'the Terror of the Town'—by the old fogies."

Once more Marion laughed her musical laugh.

"Do you remember, John, when that old woman went to Father and told him that I ought to be taken in hand, at once?"

"Do I remember it? I should think I did! I had dared you to the lark and I trembled with remorse when you were overtaken."

"Ah! you didn't know Father! He took me to his study and in a most dramatic way told me that the Congregation had complained of me—'They say,' he said, 'that you run too wild and that I ought to *take you in hand.*' He scowled so hard that I was terribly frightened: then, with that wonderful smile of his—you remember?—he turned and said—'I have decided, my daughter, to take you in *two* hands' and he held out both hands, drew me into his arms, laughed and kissed me! Wasn't it just like him?" A shadow fell over Marion's face: "And now," she gave a little



choked sob, "I am all alone—Oh, what shall I do?"

"Isn't old Alice with you?" John asked tenderly: he remembered the faithful old nurse who had been an institution at the Parsonage—a friend to all the children who frequented it.

Two large tears rolled slowly down Marion's cheeks as she looked at John with sorrowful eyes.

"No, I had to part with her: she was fine, very fine—she wanted to stay with me and take care of me without wages!—but, of course, I would not consent to that. I think that, to me, almost the worst of leaving the Parsonage was to feel that Alice had to go amongst strangers. It doesn't so much matter as far as I am concerned, but Alice is old and she had been with Father always. Just fancy her having to adapt herself to new persons and new ways!"

"I can't fancy it—and I don't like to!" said John, huskily. He fought hard with an emotion rising within him. He felt he was again the boy sitting beside his best friend yearning to comfort her as he used to do when she was hurt: to protect her with loyal chivalry as he used to do when trouble overtook her: the friend with whom he had always shared his nuts, his smoothest and his prettiest pebbles and all his hard-won treasures.

An ardent impulse of frank comradeship possessed him. John had always been given to spontaneous impulses: of late a sophisticated reserve had held this tendency in check: there was a reac-

tionary joy in being once more overswept by one —he was for a moment *just* the boy: he did not stop to think, to weigh, to consider!

"Why not?" he said to himself—"She has been my friend since babyhood: her father was my mother's dearest friend throughout her married life: he taught me the best I know in literature and in life: she is exactly like a sister—she has been, always, exactly like a sister."

"Marion——" his voice startled her.

"Yes," she answered with indrawn breath.

"Marion, we have been friends since babyhood."

The warm colour flew to her pale cheeks—"We have always been friends!"

"Marion, may I beg a favour of you? Will you be generous?—Will you let me help you?"

"Oh, yes!" and she held out her hand.

"Thank you. I will see the use, the good, of my fortune if you will use it!"

She looked at him, dazed for a moment, then she rose and backed away from him: her eyes grew large and wide—deep within them a furious fire began to blaze.

"Money?"—her tone was tense—"You mean *money!* You DARE!"

Here was a new Marion: the girl, who had been a simple eager child the moment before, became suddenly magnificent in the sweeping rush of her pride: she was a flaming creature that combined



and condensed the bitterness, the withering wrath, the fierce uncompromising scorn of woman.

"I might have known!" Her words were like a lash. "How could I have expected anything different from the man who sold his soul for money!"

"Marion!" The dignity in John's voice would have held in check another woman: but Marion knew no half-way mood—she went on hotly:

"You had it in you to do great things—to become famous, distinguished—but what are you? Have you a public reputation, as you might have had?—No. Are you famous in politics, in art, in literature?—No. What active interest do you take in the throbbing democratic life of the world—the life that is moving on to great issues? —NONE! What do you stand for?—The papers speak of you as a well-dressed multimillionaire! Ough!" she made a gesture of scorn with her expressive hands: there was more shuddering denunciation in her "ough" than in all the recorded philippics. She paused, but before he could speak she continued—"I—I—Why should I not say it?—I LOVED YOU!"—though her words were like scathing fire they had a simple directness as if spoken by a disembodied soul—"I loved the man I thought you were. You knew it—that May morning when we parted in the orchard—you knew it—the night before—as well as if I had shouted it upon the housetop! I had been unmaidenly enough to let you see my heart—fool

enough to trust you—to *show* you that I loved you—Ah! *how* I loved you! And what did you do?—You flung me aside, out of your path—for what? For glory?—for distinction? No!—for common dross—for MISERABLE MONEY——"

"Marion!——"

But she rushed on, unheeding.

"Then, thank God, I *stopped* loving you—hate burned out the love! I *hated* you—more, far more, than I had ever loved you! And—after a while—I didn't care enough even to hate: I *forgot*—FORGOT, do you understand? You were nothing to me—nothing whatever! To-day, when you wrote about Father"—the break in her voice gripped John's heart—"I even forgot your dastardly act—I went straight back to our childhood—I remembered how we had studied together in his room—I let you come—I welcomed you—I was *glad* to welcome you—I did not know"—there was no break in her voice now, her words were like the sting of a sharp stiletto—"I did not know that you had come to insult me!"

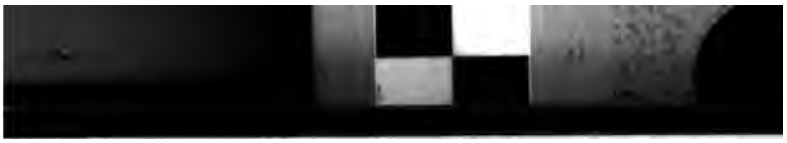
"Insult you? Oh!" John's voice was full of anguish.

"Yes, insult me—could any insult be greater than to offer me money—after—after—that May morning?"

John uttered a cry like the cry of a drowning man.

"You do not understand——"

"Hush! I will not listen to you ever again!"



she interrupted him, raising her hand with the superb gesture of an high priestess—

"Your soul is so buried under material dross, that you have lost the power even to see what you have done. It is a waste of breath to talk to you —a man without a soul is dead—*dead*—DEAD!— Good afternoon."



CHAPTER XVIII

How he got out of the little room, when Marion abruptly left him, John never knew: how he found his way back to the farm, he never knew. A dreary March storm had come up and the sleet beat upon his face; he was unconscious of it: the shadows fell deep and heavy; he was unconscious of them.

When he reached the farm house, he gave peremptory orders to Eben not to disturb him and went up to his old den.

He turned the rusty key in the door, sat down at the battered desk where he had spent so many hours of work, of hope, of ambition; and there, in the gathering twilight, he faced himself.

Too late he knows, too late he understands, too late he sees his irrevocable doom.

The miracle has happened in his life! Love has at last asserted its immortal self! It has always been there—with folded wings, *waiting*—now the wings are wide spread! He knows now that he has always loved Marion: since the early days when together they roamed the woods, waded the streams, climbed the mountains marvelling at the wonder of unfolding life, he has loved her and *only* her—there had never been any one but Marion!—No one except HIMSELF!—Alas! Self



had been there, obtrusive, eclipsing, confusing, hiding the light—his volatile, passionate, thoughtless, undeveloped, unconsidering Self: that Self—the tempestuous outcome of perpetual battle between dynamic strength to do great things and fatal weakness to yield to oversweeping currents of temptation—that Self had come between the vision vouchsafed to him and his own soul.

Marion had been beside him a bright radiance, and he had been concerned with his own affairs, his own prospects, his own interests, his material desires, his worldly ambitions: he had taken her for granted as he had taken for granted the sun and the circumambient air: she had been one with the beauty of hill and dale, of flowering meadows and cloud-crowned hills; and he had turned from the *familiar* in his impatient curiosity to discover the *unknown:* the true realisation of her had been obscured by the vivid alluring pictures his mind made of the women who lived beyond the hills, which had held a fascination, a tempting lure to his youthful dreams: more potent than sirens to a man are the phantoms formed by his own imagining.

Then he had gone to New York, and in the benumbing intoxication of the manifold adventures, excitements, interests, happenings, and surprises of the last two years the thought of Marion had drifted into the background. But *now* he KNOWS! He has seen the women beyond the hills and he has seen Marion with new vision: he

can compare them with impartial eyes:—amongst them all Marion shines like a morning star!

The city women are dazzling products of their class: this one is clever—that one is cultured—another is beautiful—another is sparkling—Mrs. Winthrop, ah! Mrs. Winthrop is more than most;—but true men are triune and need a circle to satisfy the soul.

Mrs. Winthrop arouses his senses, stimulates his mind; but his spiritual self is stifled in her presence; he knows that soul-expression would bore that bright lady to yawns: whilst Marion! —Marion quickens the hidden springs: in HER presence he becomes aware of that "unregarded river" of his life which pursues "with indiscernible flow its way" beneath the hard surface which has overlaid him. He feels that with Marion he knows "the hills where his life rose" and "the sea where it goes." When he is with Marion the vision shines beneath the veil and he hears the beating of the angel's wings. Yet, none the less, is her charm a very human one—vital, arousing, stimulating; her mind a sharp lance to meet and tourney with his own: she has read the books he has read—she has pondered the subjects he has pondered, she discusses them cleverly and well without pretence, with crystalline simplicity—in all things she is frank and straightforward which, in the final analysis, is the most lasting charm of character.

Yes! he can compare her in this hour of revela-



tion! She moves every side of his nature: in spiritual beauty she awakens his soul, in mental strength she arouses his mind; and even his senses, which the alluring women of New York delight, find greater delight in Marion Meredith's beauty: the women of New York compared with her are as costly works of art to a fresh June rose with morning dew sparkling upon its petals.

Marion had stood before him, unadorned, untouched by any art or artifice of toilette—she had had no stage upon which to play her part, no environment to advantage her; yet, in that ugly barren little room of the dressmaker's, in her austere black she was beautiful beyond compare and stirring beyond precedent: she had circled the whole gamut of human emotion—she had touched with poignant appeal every vibrant chord, dramatically; finally the flash of her scorn, her proud wrath, her scathing words (to the truth of which his inherent, deep-down honesty responded) aroused him with galvanic quickening. A titanic force shakes him.

At last he loves as he has always known he could love. And she whom he loves is Marion Meredith! With the same surety that he knows he loves her at last, he knows that he will love her as long as his life shall endure—her simple sweetness, her splendid truth, her adorable straightforward frankness.

He tells himself that the ebb and flow of those

ignorant and unworthy years—which had tossed his unequal, unstable, volatile nature back and forth—had been but as the surging and resurging of the sea when the tide is coming in. Ah! how blind he had been, selfish, self-centred, ignoble, *blind!* Now he knows: and HE KNOWS IT IS TOO LATE.

And she had given him her love—it had been his to take!—and he had lost it!—lost it?—he had *sold* it, as he had sold himself, for millions: he had forfeited the imperishable glory for gold—he had lost his soul to gain the world—and a man without a soul is *dead:* Marion had said this—and it is true.

Nineteen hundred years ago the Great Philosopher had spoken a Word that echoes still across the centuries: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" John had often heard that word with his outward ear and it had always seemed to him merely the ambiguous statement of a transcendentalist: but he had never *really* heard it until that hour. At last the echo rang and vibrated through and through his consciousness: it was no longer merely a text for a parson to preach from on a Sabbath morning: it was a vital practical truth, as modern and as alive to-day as when He, who spake it, asked the question. He—John—had lost his soul! and what gain had come to him in the transaction? It was a plain mathematical problem—a question of profit and loss, as much



so as any account kept in a ledger. As he sat in his little barren room amidst the gathering shadows, an invisible balance sheet lay before him: his mind visualised the account and with clear calculation he considered it.

Profit—Gold, Material Possessions, Worldly Power that comes from outward circumstance, Triumph in temporary and transitory things.

Loss—Freedom, Love, Abundant Life, Power and Mastery over circumstance, the finer perceptions that evolve from the unbartered soul.

Ah! the tragedy of the Account! In this hour he sees the loss of gain, the worthlessness of gold, the misery of millions! What is his fortune but a prison-house to shut him from love and from life? What is his money now but a chain upon his hands and feet to bind him to his doom? What is his lot, in the midst of his wealth, but bondage, slavery, serfdom to possessions—and loneliness—utter loneliness? Never to touch that dear hand again! never to see the light in those eyes, as of old he saw it—sometimes like unto the calm clear moon of the evening and sometimes like unto the bright sun of the morning! Never, never! No, he must sit face to face with lifeless, stupid gold! Money is the only wife that he can ever take to his arms—coupons are the only children he can ever possess!

Of course he can, he *will* get out, somehow—he must think—to-morrow when there is time he will think how he can most quickly escape, but though

he win back his manhood from the shameful bargain, yet Marion is lost—the promised Land of Love is closed to him for ever—closed by his own irreverent and careless hand—O God!

Perhaps that is what Hell is! the choice given—the choice made—and then the having to live always with the consequences of that choice. Damnation may be merely having to eat of the fruit of the tree that we ourselves have planted.

And Marion had loved him!—if he had known that!—*had* he not known it? No: he had felt what he *thought* was her love but it had been only a *hope:* that he could have won her that evening in the orchard long ago, he knew then, as well as now—that he had *already* won her, he did *not* know—he had never known until to-day, when her burning words bravely proclaimed it: he had sold his soul for a mess of pottage, but he would not have sold the heart of a girl—never would he have done so base a thing! He had turned his eyes away from all that lay beneath the veil which Marion had lifted that May day—he had seen the radiant response to his fire—ah! he can recall it now—but he had abstained from gazing; he had held his mind in equal balance as to her answer to the question he had planned to ask: he had been in doubt if she knew what that question was to be: and when she left him, with a gay song on her laughing lips, in the orchard at sunrise, he had been convinced that she had had no suspicion: [redacted]cad—cur—anything you please that he had been,



there was a chivalry within him that never would have let him take her love for granted.

But he had sold *himself,* his future, the opportunity to seek and win her love, the freedom to make his own life.

Thus his thoughts ran on and on: and finally he comes to the present.

What had he done to-day? He had merely fulfilled the logical outcome of his ignoble course. Marion was right—she was scathing and sharp—but she was right—nothing that she had said in her splendid wrath was sharper than the things that he said to himself—as he stood now apart from himself and reviewed the situation as an impartial outsider. He had done a foul deed; he *had insulted* her! It was a dastardly thing to do, dastardly—to offer her money after that May morning! John was not as fair to himself as he would have been to another—his logic and compassion did not plead his own cause as he would have pleaded the cause of a friend. That act was hideous, undoubtedly; it was lacking in high chivalry, but the *intent*—the purpose—was *not* dastardly nor lacking in another kind of chivalry; it had all seemed so different—so altogether different, when he had felt compelled to speak, from the way the cold bare act looked now that he saw it in retrospect. It had seemed, in the spontaneous fraternal mood of the moment, normal, natural, fitting: in fact, the only thing a considerate brother could do for a sister in distress. And

that showed as nothing else could show—how the finer subtler essence of his nature, the nice discriminations had been lost: how his standard of measurement had been belittled!—how his vision had been blurred and befogged by Mammon.

His head sank on his closed fists and rested there—the shadows fell—it grew dark. The mental action went on—but with less coherence—more disjointedly. In spite of the cold, large drops of perspiration gathered on his forehead, his nails cut into the palms of his hands. After a time he lifted his head and took his match-box from his pocket; with one of its wax matches he lighted the candle on the desk: as the candle flamed and sputtered the jewels in the match-box, catching the light, glittered brightly: the diamonds that wove themselves into the initials of his name flashed out: a sudden fury possessed him—a blinding hatred of wealth, of jewels, of luxury, of possessions; with an impetuous impulse he flung the match-box across the room into a dark and dusty corner: it was a petulant and childish act, but it was indicative of the forces hot within him, eloquent of his newborn thoughts and deep despair.

Then he wrote letter after letter which he signed only to destroy. What were words? Unto what was explanation? Was it not adding a deeper wrong to the wrong already done? How dare he speak one word to her! She had said she would not listen to him ever again—and there was with-



in him a flaming sense of justice that admitted she was in the right.

The hours passed: Eben, outside, fumed and fretted: the supper that Mary Jane had cooked was burned to a crisp: but still Eben did not dare to knock: as a farmer senses the coming of a storm so he sensed some deep disaster to this man whom he loved.

At last John wrote a letter which he did not destroy: he looked at it when it was finished, knew it was inadequate, perhaps impertinent, knew it was as foolish to send it to Marion as it would be to send tinder to burning brush; but he could not be silent, and this was the best that he could do. Slowly, he read the letter aloud:

"In the name of your own great soul, I beseech you, hear me, Marion.

"I am unworthy to approach your presence: but—though all the world withheld me—I must speak!

"I will not ask you to forgive me—for I have forfeited the right to ask. Perhaps, after long years of suffering have passed, after I have done the penance that my heart demands, then I may lift up my eyes to the radiant vision of your face and ask to be forgiven.

"I will not tell you that what I did, to-day, seems altogether different from what I purposed to do, because—as you unerringly divined—that only proves the dullness of my perception.

"But I *must* tell you that I love you! Even God permits the lowliest penitent to express his love.

"I love you with a love that is as much higher than anything I ever dreamed, as the heavens are higher than the earth: that love will abide with me as long as my life shall last.

"I know now that you have always compelled my love—since the days when together we looked for the fairies amongst the flowers: but the mists and the fogs of earth, the miasma of the marshes blinded and dimmed my eyes. To-day, your glory pierced the vapours and you shone forth to my soul!—I saw you as you are, and never again can my soul lose the vision of that light. Through the anguish that my base act has irrevocably bound upon me, I shall keep the vision—it will lead me on to something higher, something better than I have ever known—because Love redeems the most unworthy—and—I love you, Marion.

"Though you refuse to listen to me, perhaps, as years pass, you may not refuse to remember my ever-unfolding love.

"When your heart is bitter, I pray you, remember—I love you! When your anger rises and would consume me, remember—I love you! As life goes on and the shadows lengthen, remember—I love you! When you pass beyond this mortal veil, remember—I love you! Through all the ages, and the after ages that you believe are to come, remember—I love you!

"JOHN."



He sealed the note and handed it to Eben with strict and implicit directions to put it with his own hand into Marion's hand: then—without food, without even a glass of water—he went out into the dark, and caught the midnight train for New York.

CHAPTER XIX

VERY early the following morning Eben went to Miss Smith's and asked for Marion. When he saw her he felt great relief; he decided that she was much better than she had been since her father died: her cheeks looked "as red as Spitzenburg apples," he told himself, and "her eyes were as snappy as snap." She took the letter which Eben brought her, quite casually, as she might have taken any unimportant scrap of paper: she talked pleasantly to him, but Eben noticed an unusual sense of haste to be done and off: this appealed to his practical good sense: "of course," he thought, "she has a deal of things to do." Eben resented it that Marion had to work, yet, if she could only once get a wee bit stronger, he told himself, "it wouldn't do her no harm, for work's healthy." That Marion must now sew for others filled his honest heart with wrath, "but what you do," Eben said to himself argumentatively, "ain't so much deeference as how you do it, an' if Mees Marion has to sew seams, she'll sew 'em straight." As Marion talked to him, she was praying that he would go before the dam, which she had built to keep back the furious flood that threatened her, should break: as soon as he



left she hastened to her tiny garret room, shut herself in and locked the door.

"A letter!" she said scornfully: "He *dares* to write me a letter! Last night was the second time! What can he find to say to me? What words can he *dare* to write? I will burn the letter, unread; I will not flatter him even by returning it to him; that would be to acknowledge his existence."

Silence was the only thing that a woman's pride —a woman's dignity could return to such an insult as he had given to her. But a power stronger than her will made her break the seal, even whilst she was mentally annihilating the letter. And then she read the words that John had written in his agony!—read them and understood.

By a woman's psychic sense and intuition Marion knew—with a final surety which nothing could shake—that here was no uncertain sound! In spite of everything—her wrath, her pride, her indignation—she knew that John loved her at last: she had thought she knew it that May morning centuries ago—but now, ah! now she knew beyond all peradventure that *this* was the birth-cry of a man's soul.

Over and over many times she read the letter which John had written from his anguish-laden heart: and yet—how strange a paradox is woman! —a stronger, fiercer anger grew even as she realised the majesty of his love.

She struck a match and held the letter a mo-

ment, looking at it with an inscrutable expression, then touched the match to it and held it over a little tray and watched it burn: it burned until the flame reached her finger and her thumb, still she held it, and still it burned—the finger and the thumb were blistered but she did not flinch; there was relief in the physical pain: when the last fragment of paper was consumed between her fingers and the flame had quite died out, she looked a moment scornfully at the few ashes fallen in the tray, then she went to the high dormer window, opened it, and blew the ashes far out upon the March wind. Then she went to the tiny table that she used as a desk and hurriedly wrote the following note—

"My dear Miss Smith:

"Father's friend—and my friend—

"You, who are so good to me, told me always to ask you for anything that I might need. I need a little quiet—please!

"Will you be good enough to guard my door for several hours? I am on the verge of one of my all-day headaches: I must lie down and keep absolutely quiet.

"It is better for me to stay away from dinner: so if you will excuse me I will not see you until supper time. By then I know I shall be better.

"For all your dear care, so generous and so kind, I am deeply appreciative and grateful.

"Thank you in Father's name,

"Marion."



Calling the little char-girl Marion gave her the note to hand to Miss Smith when she returned from market, and went back to her garret chamber.

This day, Marion told herself, she would keep the vigil with her heart and its new secret.

Once more she turned the key of her door and locked herself in alone to face her sorrow—and her newborn gladness!—her anguish—and her ineffable joy!

The sun rose bright and sparkling the next day: Marion dressed herself in a plain black cloth suit and a small black hat with only a severe band of crepe upon it: she looked at herself critically in the glass, and pinned close some rebellious stray curls. She looked very trim as she went out into the crisp air and walked quickly to the trolley station. She was only a girl going amongst strangers to look for a position, she told herself, but for some strange reason she felt like a Walkyr riding on the wind to battle—and to victory.

She took the trolley to the large town near Elmcroft. There, she had an appointment with the Principal of a much-advertised school for girls.

Two weeks before Marion had seen a notice of the death of the Teacher of English Literature, and she had written at once to the Principal, Miss Howe, asking that she be considered for the position: a week ago she had received an answer, appointing an interview for to-day.

During the week Marion had been eagerly looking forward to the event: she had an exultant sense that, in her talk with John—when she was gaily picturing to him an imaginary future—some inner reserve had kept her from confiding to him her real and secret hope. Trim hats?—Will Bristo's secretary?—How absurd! Marion's desire and purpose was to teach: since her earliest girlhood little children had always brought to her their difficult problems; she could make them understand their lessons when no one else could: this hope of teaching had been her beacon light since the moment she had had to face life alone: and now it was a possibility; the very fact that Miss Howe was granting the interview was promising: at least no one else had been given the position. She held to her hope with confidence and humility: confidence because she felt within herself a power—and humility because she realised that the splendid task of teaching is the greatest of all tasks and, because, appreciating the equipment which is needed for that task, she was keenly conscious of her own limitation: "I am an unqualified idiot—compared with Father!" she said to herself as she hastened on.

Marion had heard that Miss Howe was more formidable than her mansion; that she was noted for a certain uncompromising rigidity: she had no tolerance for shams nor for pretence and persons who had grievances were given to calling her haughty and freezing.



Marion, therefore, approached the stately house with trembling: the trembling, however, was only an inward trembling: her outward bearing, as she gave the servant her name, aroused that very smart white-capped and well-aproned personage to show Marion into the reception-room with the elaborate air which she reserved for—"them swells who knows what's what and who's who," as she called some of Miss Howe's patrons.

"Yes, miss; Miss Howe'll see you: she gave me your name and said you was to come for an appointment."

As soon as Marion looked into the fine austere face of Miss Howe, she knew that—however formidable her character might be, whatever might be her austerity in certain circumstances—hers was a strong, true and noble nature.

Miss Howe was a fine product of the best forces and best culture of the twentieth century: to her thought, the salvation of life, the hope of civilisation lie in education: she held her mission as a high and mighty trust; the splendid work of guiding girls, who are to be the future mothers of men, and of shaping the coming generation, were, to her, the great opportunity of life.

To Miss Howe, Motherhood was something more than mere breeding: and although she had never had the ineffable joy of bearing a child, she knew that she had not been denied the highest function of Motherhood, and that, after all, her lonely life had fulfilled itself in her womanhood.

Thirty years she had taught: her children were living in all parts of the world: and now her children's children were learning the lessons she had taught their mothers.

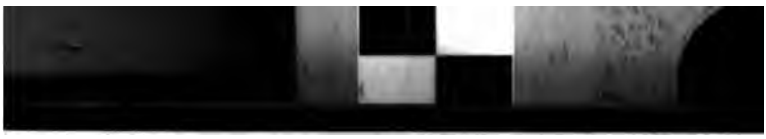
Miss Howe was not of Dr. Meredith's church nor sect, but she had had an unqualified admiration for the intellectual attainments and for the character of the man whom she had often met and with whom she had often discussed educational matters. She received Marion with cordial kindness:

"I knew your father, Miss Meredith," she said, "and, with all the world, I honoured and admired him."

The rush of colour to Marion's face was more eloquent than words. Miss Howe, with her quick discernment, saw at once that good fortune had come to her in this girl: but it was like Miss Howe to test the value of her own intuition before accepting it as a conclusion: and she was always businesslike and drastic in her investigation.

The following hour was one of penetrating questions from Miss Howe and frank answers from Marion—who confessed to herself afterwards that the Shorter Catechism was not a circumstance compared with Miss Howe.

They had not spoken long before Miss Howe discovered that the girl had responded to the exceptional advantages she had had in being trained by Dr. Meredith.



"And when, Miss Meredith," Miss Howe asked, at last, "did you finish your education?"

Marion was disconcerted for a moment, then she answered simply—

"Never, Miss Howe!"

"Ah," said Miss Howe, "never?"

"No, Miss Howe. I expect to study until I die. Father says—I mean he used to say—that so far, I have only been learning how to learn and studying how to study."

Miss Howe's fine grey head bent toward Marion:

"My dear, that was a test question. The place is yours, if you desire it: the salary is twelve hundred a year."

Marion gave a start of surprise—her voice trembled—

"Twelve hundred a year!—Father would be so glad! But—but—O Miss Howe—are you *sure* you are not making a mistake! I am afraid—I am so ignorant—to be quite frank with you, sometimes I feel that I do not know anything."

Miss Howe's smile made her austere face very pleasant.

"That, my child, is the beginning of wisdom. I do not often make mistakes."

In the discussion of details which followed, Marion's practical training and her executive capacity and grasp stood her in good stead.

Finally, all was settled and Marion was about

to take her departure: impulsively she turned back from the door.

"Miss Howe, forgive me! I do not think I thanked you for your great kindness."

"Indeed, you did!" said that lady kindly: "You thanked me most eloquently." She took Marion's hand. "May I say a personal word to you, Miss Meredith?"

"Oh, please, Miss Howe, say anything. I want all the help possible to make me right for you."

Miss Howe held her hand and looked at her a moment—the tenderness of memory in her eyes.

"You have had sorrow, my dear, but let me assure you that no matter how difficult it is to forget self there is no medicine for sorrow like Work: the constant working with young minds, and seeing your work bear fruit, will bring an impersonal happiness which will give you a new and more abundant life. It is hard to have one's own personal joy cut short, but the universal happiness that comes from service is, believe me, a bigger thing than anything personal can be!"

A deep flush overspread Marion's face and neck from the band of her black toque to the band of her white collar. Miss Howe was thinking of Dr. Meredith and of the loneliness of the young life suddenly bereft of father and of home—but at that moment Marion was not thinking of her father.



CHAPTER XX

When John entered his palatial dwelling in the grey of the morning after his long ride from Elmcroft, it looked to him like a strange place and he, who had come in the past two years to have a feeling of being completely at home in the ancestral mansion, felt like a stranger. He was in dire need of food, he had tasted nothing since noon of the day before and he was being overswept by mighty currents, the strength of which he had not estimated. As he passed through the house the evidence of luxury seemed to crush the very life out of him, even as the golden bracelets had crushed Tarpeia at the Roman gates, centuries ago, when she had let in the alien forces. He, too, had betrayed his citadel, the fortress of his own soul, and had let in the alien forces: the insensate, inanimate things—of luxury, of beauty and of art—seemed to lie heavy upon him, to asphyxiate and to benumb him: a sense of hostility arose within him—a wild feeling of fury: he hated the house, he hated everything in it, he hated the money that ran it, but more than all he hated the man who had sold himself for that money! He hated the man who could possibly do such a crass, crude and unmannerly act as his rash impulse had led him to do yesterday.

With this strange feeling of being crushed by an insensate mass, alternated another feeling—as unreasonable and abnormal—which came from his overwrought nerves and the hectic fever of the brain that sometimes follows sudden shock: this was the feeling that the things were *not* insensate—but that they were, on the contrary, all alive and menacing: the pictures, the bronzes, the bric-à-brac seemed endowed with personality—and they seemed to be grinning at him: a large bronze figure in the hall, which had been a special pride to him, as he passed it, became to his excited imagination a hideous monster of Fate: it actually seemed to wink at him for the trick which Fate had played him.

After his cold shower, brisk rub and strong coffee, however, he rallied from the shock of the blow which had been, in its intensity, like a physical stroke: things assumed their normal proportion and life fell outwardly into its accustomed groove.

He got the situation and himself in hand, in spite of the dull, gnawing ache at his heart—that ache which comes after any great catastrophe, and grips one unseen when one is striving to keep mechanical pace in old familiar ways.

He gave his orders briefly, looked through the important mail awaiting him, and hastily left the house. With a new impatience, and with something of his old impetuosity, he ran quickly down



the steps of the Remington house and started for the Law Office of Grimes and Marvin.

John found Mr. Grimes deep in the midst of affairs, although it was only ten o'clock in the morning. Mr. Grimes was always spick and span: even late in the day he always looked as though he were beginning his day: at five o'clock of an afternoon he had the air of having just come from his tub and the hands of his valet. Neither dust nor dirt nor any of the common stains of daily life seemed to touch Mr. Grimes: his collars were never wilted by summer heat: his hair was never ruffled by winter winds: his clothes seemed to throw off dust by their own initiative, apparently needing no whisk broom: even his clear glasses were without speck or spot.

After one glance at John's face, Mr. Grimes led the way into his private office and carefully closed the door.

The room, like the master, shone with scrupulous cleanliness; there was not a particle of dust anywhere; the polished desk was orderly and well arranged: Mr. Grimes was one of the busiest lawyers in New York, as John knew; he had innumerable affairs of great importance in his hands, large corporations to safeguard and areas of real estate to look after—yet not a piece of paper, not a letter, not even a memorandum was to be seen. Files and chests of private drawers, carefully docketed, stood against the wall; but the desk might have been the desk of a fastidious old lady,

so careful was it in its nicety and absence of all business suggestions.

The fine Persian rug on the floor was rich in colour, the prints upon the walls were historic and valuable, the red leather chairs with carved backs were massive and handsome.

"In what way may I serve you, Mr. Wright?"

Mr. Grimes always spoke with much formal politeness: the more he disapproved of a man the more punctilious was that politeness: and he had no enthusiasms nor illusions about John, none whatever. John was very pale: his lips and throat were parched.

"Mr. Grimes, I want to get out of this."

Mr. Grimes coughed his dry little cough:

"Get out? I fail to grasp your meaning, Mr. Wright."

"I want to get out of this slavery—this bondage to my uncle's estate."

Mr. Grimes looked at him coldly, in silence.

"I must," John continued, "break this diabolical net that I walked into—with my eyes open, it is true, but without due consideration or knowing what I was doing. I want to get out!—I *intend* to get out, and I look to you, Mr. Grimes, to help me out."

Mr. Grimes took off his glasses, polished them with elaborate care, replaced them on his sharp and slender nose, and said quietly:

"Your metaphor is at fault, Mr. Wright; if you will pardon me, it is in no sense a net."

"For God's sake, what is it then?"

"It is a dalmatic, which you have assumed."

"Nonsense!" snapped John.

Mr. Grimes continued in his legal voice:

"A trust is always an investiture, Mr. Wright."

John threw back his head:

"This was a trust forced upon me—a trust which I never sought—a trust I was tempted to assume in haste before I had considered it *fully* or realised what it involved of bondage—of agony!"

Mr. Grimes gave John a penetrating glance:

"Since when has the ethical responsibility of a trust been dependent upon the pleasure derived by the trustee? The matter was laid before you, Mr. Wright. You accepted the residuary estate of your great uncle under the conditions imposed in the will: you signed a covenant that you would fulfil and perform the conditions submitted for your consideration—and then after signing that covenant you took possession of the estate and entered the home of the testator——"

"I did not know what it would involve," interrupted John impatiently.

"At least, Mr. Wright, you were given full opportunity to apprehend what it would involve: if the limitations of human intelligence and the absence of prophetic vision prevented you from foreseeing the future, that does not seem to me —nor would it have seemed to your great uncle —sufficient cause for betraying your trust."

"It would not be binding in any law in any land," said John hotly.

"Possibly the compulsion of a condition may be questioned, but the obligations of a covenant upon a man's honour cannot be questioned."

Mr. Grimes spoke in the judicial tone which always most irritated John:

"It was precisely," continued Mr. Grimes, "because your great uncle was aware that he could not with surety evoke any law as an absolute defence against your failure that he desired to bind you by the aforesaid covenant."

"I call it a trap!" snapped John.

"Different persons have different viewpoints and arrive at different conclusions," said Mr. Grimes. "I should call such a sacred trust an opportunity. It is possible you may escape the trap, as *you* call it, by certain technicalities, but permit me to remind you, Mr. Wright, that man cannot escape his conscience. There are some things more binding than law, and there are deeper and stronger laws than those upon the Statute Books!"

"Mr. Grimes, I did not come here to discuss ethics: I came here to find a way out of this Hell!"

"The way out of Hell, Sir, if I may be permitted to suggest, is to avoid increasing the conditions which make Hell! I can imagine no greater Hell than a broken covenant. Through the representative of the deceased you entered into a cov-



enant with your dead uncle: according to my primitive conception of morals"—Mr. Grimes smiled satirically—"you are obligated by every code to abide by that covenant."

"My uncle was an unwholesome crank—a lunatic, and I will *not* be bound by his vagaries nor by his detestable money any longer!"

Mr. Grimes stiffened:

"Permit me to suggest, Mr. Wright, that since you *did* accept the trust and are your great uncle's representative and as you are enjoying, at the present time, the inestimable benefits that he conferred upon you, you have, perchance, forfeited the right to criticise that same uncle."

A hot flush came over John's face, a frank boyish look came into his eyes:

"That is true, Mr. Grimes. I beg my uncle's pardon—and yours. *I* was the lunatic—*I* was the madman—to take the cursed money—but, now, I have become sane. I have come to you to tell you that I *intend* to find a way out!"

"Your great uncle, with his keen far-sightedness, foresaw the possibility of just such a contingency arising; he, therefore, inserted in his will the clause concerning a covenant, which clause met with so much disfavour on your part: he desired that we might have something more definite to depend upon than your spoken word."

"*Mr. Grimes!*"

Mr. Grimes smiled grimly:

"Pardon me, but is it not somewhat exag-

gerated in the circumstances for you to take umbrage at my suggesting the possibility of your breaking your word?"

The straightforward honesty of John's mind rose above his anger: he detested the uncompromising penetration of Mr. Grimes' keen rapier thrust; he felt that he hated this cold calculating inquisitor; but he loved the truth and he had the grace to admit his error when he saw it:

"You are entirely right, Sir." He waited a moment; and as Mr. Grimes did not deign to reply he said in persuasive tones:

"I know all that you would urge, Mr. Grimes. I have said it over and over to myself a thousand times in the last twenty-four hours; but—after a night's wrestle—I am convinced that there are higher ethics than those I would hold myself bound by. It is *false morality* to be enslaved in any circumstances by a code of ethics that contradicts the ethics of life."

"I thought it was suggested that we should refrain from discussing ethics."

The very polite and suave tone in which Mr. Grimes spoke maddened John, but he went on as though Mr. Grimes had not spoken:

"If I, unthinking—unknowing, I may say—make a covenant that, later, I come to see contradicts my fundamental philosophy of life, it seems to me it is my *larger* duty to break that covenant."

"That, Mr. Wright, may be true."



"Thank you, Sir. I am glad you see the logic of it."

"I should scarcely call it logic—but I apprehend what you mean."

Mr. Grimes looked at John in silence with what John was in the habit of calling his fishy-look:—after a moment he said in quite an impersonal businesslike tone:

"Mr. Wright, what was the exact sum which you inherited from your great uncle?"

"Thirty million dollars, as you know."

"I beg you will pardon me if I ask you what is the sum you now have in your possession?"

"Twenty million dollars."

"Ten millions gone in two years!"

"Half of the capital became mine outright."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Grimes, "half of it was so left."

"If," continued John, "I desired to endow objects that have always appealed to me, to surround myself with works of art, if——"

Mr. Grimes raised his interrupting hand:

"I make no criticism, none whatever, Mr. Wright: it would be injudicious, in fact it would be altogether an impertinence for me to do so. But as the executor of your great uncle's will and as the lawyer in whose hands his testamentary affairs were left, there is another question which, with much regret, I am compelled to ask.—I beg that you will pardon me. Do you happen to have ten million dollars apart from the Remington es-

tate or from any moneys bequeathed you by your great uncle?"

A nervous tremour shook John—he suddenly saw what was coming: he could have beaten himself for his folly:

"I should think, Mr. Grimes, it would be altogether unnecessary—it certainly is rather embarrassing—to have to remind you—who have full knowledge of my affairs—that, apart from my uncle's munificent bequest, I have not a dollar in the world."

"Precisely: and I should think, Mr. Wright, it would be altogether unnecessary to remind *you* —because I infer, from your general conversation, you have regard for righteousness and probity—that, having availed yourself of the gift, you are in honesty bound by the conditions upon which you accepted that gift, until you can restore the gift to the alternative legatee exactly as you received it."

John was staggered. Two things struck him and they struck him hard—a sense of hopeless despair, and a sense of mortification—he became exceedingly uncomfortable and very much embarrassed.

"Oh, of course—" he said hoarsely,—"but I thought—I thought—that—perhaps—with your ability you could find some way by which we might go directly to the desired result."

"Doubtless there are many sharp lawyers who might favour you by endeavouring to find such a



way, but I must beg that you will excuse me from so doing."

Mr. Grimes had the air of considering the interview at an end.

"I can sell my art treasures"—gasped John, "and I can—I can—save the rest from my income."

"Undoubtedly;" Mr. Grimes' voice was colourless and cold, "but until you have so done, I cannot consider you—nor myself—freed from the obligations covering the premises."

"When I do—then——"

Mr. Grimes bowed slightly:

"Then, sir, it will be time to discuss the matter."

CHAPTER XXI

JOHN hurried home, locked himself in his room and gave way to gusts of hopeless despair: he felt like a trapped thing as he sat with clinched hands in his sumptuous den. He remembered a morning many years ago in the Elmcroft woods when he had set a trap for a rabbit and, boylike, had hidden behind a tree to see the woodland tragedy enacted to the finish. The rabbit had come scampering through the woods, had smelt the dainty bit in the trap and had made for it without consideration—snap had clicked the tiny door, the rabbit was caught behind inexorable bars and all the wide free beautiful world was outside.

John remembered as though it had been yesterday the sense of shame and cruelty that had rushed over him, the lump that had risen in his throat, the spots that had burned upon his cheeks as he ran out of his hiding place, broke open the trap door and let the wild thing free to scamper through the green woods.

He remembered still the breath of relief he had drawn as the wild little animal ran gaily over the fallen leaves: he remembered, also, the sense of dread with which he had confessed to Eben



what he had done, and waited for Eben's gruff reproof. Eben had a scorn of anything that savoured of the unmanly or the sissylike and John had trembled in his young mortification at his failure to be manlike and unflinching as Eben always exacted of him: and he remembered the intense relief that had come to his childish heart when Eben had smiled and said gruffly: "Wal, Boy, you did just right. I got you that trap 'cause you wanted to catch the critter. We will throw it away—that's all traps are fit for; I never could abide trapped things meself; critters was all made to be free." Now, he—John—of all creatures made to be free—was trapped—TRAPPED.

Thank God, he would get out, but he must stay in the trap for years and years. He was not even free to press his purpose to swift conclusions. He must still keep up the state of the old house, so long as he was under the conditions of the will, and he could not, so long as he must keep up the house in traditional state, save quickly from his income to enable him to escape the conditions of the will.

He could not cut off the enormous expenses attending his position so long as he remained legatee—and he could not sharply and stringently cut down his expenditure so long as he had to make the extravagant outlay incumbent upon his position. It was a tragic tangle—an intricate problem which would take some time to unravel and disentangle.

He must study it carefully, think it all out, and meanwhile his heart ached with a passionate pain: the gates of morning were closed against him and he stood before the portal of a dark night without stars.

For five hours he sat face to face with the situation: his native quickness came to his aid: many schemes, many possible plans flashed to his mind —only to meet difficulties, as he considered them. He was hampered on every side. Whatever he did it would be, at the very least, years before he could be free: for years he would have to stay in the trap and live a life that contradicted life.

He had a mad desire to sit and work out his problem, to ponder possibilities—but he must go! He must go to a dinner! If he could go forth to a battle—to some great adventure—! but to a silly dinner!—it was unendurable!!

"I should rather shovel snow or handle pig-iron than go to a dinner to-night," he said, as he made his immaculate toilette with scrupulous care. It struck his sense of humour as an utterly absurd thing that when every nerve was aching in his body, every fibre quivering in his soul, and when his brain was awhirl in the vortex of the readjustment of ideas, of life itself—he had to dress and go to a dinner! He would not confer any benefit, he would not accomplish anything by going, but he was held tight in the vice of his acquired standards of the conventional social code: he had accepted the invitation three weeks before—it had



become an obligation: of course he could have said he was ill, one could always say that, but then he would have had to be ill for months to escape; every night was pledged for two months ahead. Ah! he would gladly give anything for the solace and comfort of freedom for a week, to cast up accounts with his own soul, to face the future, to contemplate his overwhelming love, to commune with his own heart, and to decide how best to meet his doom: but freedom was the one thing his money could not buy: moreover he was in bondage to the false standards under which he was enrolled.

It was a sufficient strain to him to go out to dinner, but the strain had a capping climax when he read on the card which the servant handed to him the name of the woman whom he was to take in to dinner—Mrs. Winthrop!

For a moment the brilliant hall where he stood seemed to swing like a globe on a pendulum. Mrs. Winthrop! It was the obvious thing, from the standpoint of the hostess the gracious thing: but Mrs. Winthrop's very existence had been banished from his mind! A hectic thought of her rushed swiftly back bringing a sense of strange confusion, a shadow of shame to his soul. He well knew that Mrs. Winthrop would be, of all women, a daw to peck at his heart if he wore it anywhere near his sleeve: therefore, he drew his cloak of reticence and reserve about him with

fine courtesy. Mrs. Winthrop confessed to herself that he had never been more charming.

"Your American Beauties gave me your message, Mr. Wright," she said, at last, under cover of the rising table-talk.

"I was very sorry to have to disappoint myself and break my engagement with you, Madame," John said. What else could he say?

"Did you have a pleasant time?" she asked.

"I should scarcely call it amusing," he answered quietly: his eyes were like flinty steel: there was something ominous in his tone: Mrs. Winthrop drew a breath of relief.

"Ah! now I know you were bored!"

"I do not think *'bored'* is the precise word."

"What is the word, then?" Mrs. Winthrop spoke gaily, more sure of her ground.

"I will ask you for the word, Mrs. Winthrop: if you had known a man for years, liked him immensely, thought him on the whole a good fellow and suddenly realised that he was very different from your thought of him, would it bore you or——"

"How tragic," Mrs. Winthrop interrupted lightly; "did you know him well?"

"I *thought* that I knew him better than any other man—he was my closest friend—but I find I never knew him in the least until yesterday."

"How exciting! And he has turned out to be a fraud?"

John considered a moment:



"No; I think I may say he is *not* a fraud—that is, if he is a fraud, he is self-deceived; but he is everything else *short* of a fraud: he is a brute, he is a base ingrate, he is an egotist, he is lacking in all chivalry and——"

"*Mon Dieu!*" Mrs. Winthrop put up a protesting hand, "you take away my appetite."

"I am sorry, my dear Lady," John said in his most courtly tones, "but there are such men in the world, and the truth must be faced."

"*Eh bien!* I will face it, then; go on, tell me some more about your friend."

"He is no longer my friend; he is my most dangerous enemy."

"Then it was a quarrel?" Mrs. Winthrop felt strangely uncomfortable, she knew not why.

"It was not a quarrel—it was a revelation."

"How formidable: that sounds like the New Testament."

He looked at her with a look that frightened and fascinated her.

"Does it?" was all that he said.

"I shan't talk to you any more, Mr. Wright, you are impossible to-night," and Mrs. Winthrop turned to the man at her other side.

John lazily permitted himself to be drawn into a tiresome conversation with a long-winded dowager on his left, whereupon he was so bored that, in spite of the bitter ache in his heart, he was intellectually relieved when the clever lady on his right turned again and drew him into the

circle of her brilliancy. Books, music, gossip, chit-chat were touched upon with charm: talk always moved lightly with her—that was the advantage of these modern women of the world, John admitted to himself: when they had on their armour one could spar and fence with visor down and all the while the inner man could hold himself aloof and go on thinking.

Once, in the course of the dinner, a voice rose above the ebb and flow of conversation like a silvery bell; he heard this sentence: "Any girl who amounts to a row of pins would rather starve with the man she loves than live in lavish luxury with a man she doesn't love." He raised his eyes and, across the formal orchids and the gorgeous silver, he met the laughing eyes of Sally. Ah! then, even here it is the same! The standard is, after all, an inward standard of choice and not an outward standard of circumstance. He strained his ears to catch Sally's next remark, but her voice had fallen, the table-talk had risen and the louder buzz drowned her words as she continued her animated discussion with Captain McDougal—a well-preserved and dapper old beau—with whom Sally was a great favourite.

When the dinner was ended and the men had left the women in the drawing-room, Mrs. Winthrop drew Sally to a seat beside her and chatted charmingly for a while on points of passing interest; suddenly she opened her blue-green eyes and fixed them on the girl.



"Sally dear, I am a married woman, you are only a girl and my interest in you bids me venture to give you some advice. You must curb your ardour, you should acquire poise: the dinner-table is not the place for the interchange of confidence."

Sally shrugged her slim shoulders nonchalantly.

"If you had sat next to Captain McDougal—who prides himself on his social code—you would be sure that it was."

Sally was the one person who could ruffle Mrs. Winthrop.

"Captain McDougal is in his dotage and is no criterion. My dear, you really must learn more self-control, you are very young."

"Am I? You told me the other day that I was 'getting on.'"

The honeyed tones of Mrs. Winthrop were caressing:

"That was when I realised that you had been out three years and were not yet settled."

"Settled?" Sally wrinkled her pretty nose. "How unpleasant! It sounds as if I had dregs."

"It sounds as if I loved you, sweet child, and wanted you happily married."

"I thought marriage was a bore."

"A bore? What put that absurd idea into your head?"

"You all said so the other night when we were talking about Mrs. Strong."

"I could not have said so—for I am married to Horace."

"How very fortunate for Mr. Winthrop!" Sally looked at her with a touch of audacity and again Mrs. Winthrop felt the discomfiture which Sally, and Sally alone, could give her: she regarded Sally sharply for a moment, then said:

"Speaking of marriage, did you know that Pelham Vinton is engaged at last?"

"Is he?" said Sally indifferently; "to whom?"

"To that charming Miss Vivien. No one knows it as yet—it is a profound secret, but I heard it from the best authority."

"How nice! I am very glad—Pelham Vinton is an awfully nice chap."

"Yes, and he is so fabulously rich."

"Is he?" said Sally.

Mrs. Winthrop looked at her critically:

"Don't you know? He has inherited two fortunes."

"Has he?" said Sally.

"Yes. He is rich, handsome, clever, fascinating—altogether the most charming, the most desirable man in New York. Don't you think so, dear?"

The beryl eyes searched the girl.

"Do you think he is more desirable than Mr. Wright, Mrs. Winthrop?"

Sally's tone was noncommittal. Mrs. Winthrop's eyes still were on the girl, a hostile look came into them as she said:



"Perhaps they are somewhat alike—but, unfortunately, Mr. Wright cannot marry. Sally, dear," she added after a significant pause, "do you know I always thought that *you* rather fancied Pelham."

"Really?" Sally answered coolly. "Is that the reason you hastened to tell me of his engagement?"

"I told you because you are good friends and I thought you would be glad to hear of his happiness."

"I am, thanks awfully."

"Of course, you understand what I have said is entirely *entre nous?*"

"Certainly. How delightfully exciting, Mrs. Winthrop, to share a secret with you!"

Ameda Winthrop could not be quite sure if this were flattery or sarcasm.

"Tell me, sweet child, was I wrong—did you not at one time have a slight enthusiasm in your girlish heart for the fascinating Pelham Vinton?"

Sally's gay smile flashed from eyes and lips—and in her sweetest, most gracious but most baffling tone she answered:

"Is the wise, clever, all-knowing Mrs. Winthrop *ever* wrong?"

"Sally!" called her hostess from across the room, "there are some new photographs of Millicent and her boys, just come from Rome."

Sally walked over to the table to which her hostess pointed and took up the photographs.

"How lovely!" she said; "the children—what perfect darlings! Think of Millicent being the mother of those big boys!"

Sally was studying the photographs when the men entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Winthrop, watching, saw—to her chagrin—John walk over to Sally with eagerness: she saw them sit together on a low window-seat, apart from the others.

"Pardon me, Miss Sally," John began, "I heard you at dinner. I strained my ears, but I heard only that one declaration—the rest was lost in the hubbub to my great regret: but I liked what I heard—it is my own creed—for men as well as for girls."

Sally looked him straight in the eyes, fresh, frank and charming:

"Whereupon you know all; you have divined that I am in love," she paused a moment and then continued, "in love with a penniless beggar and intend to marry him, in spite of family howls."

"On the contrary, I am quite sure that if you were, you would not have said what you did."

"How clever of you, Mr. Wright."

"My cleverness consists in knowing how clever you are."

Sally looked at him with merry eyes.

"If I were very, very, exceedingly clever, I should do *just* that, because I should know that clever persons would think that I was too clever *to do* it."



"One must be wide awake to keep up with you, Miss Sally. That young man, whomever he may be, is most fortunate."

Sally looked at John and saw the hidden pain which others had not seen beneath his armour. Moved by a sudden impulse, she spoke: "Mr. Wright, should you like to be a father-confessor?"

"As a matter of fact, that was my vocation: I ran away from my destiny when I did not become a priest."

"Then I think I will tell you a story:" she paused a moment as though embarrassed and then began with a pretty air of hesitation:

"When I was in the woods last season, I went out fishing one day: I went alone without a guide, for I know the woods as I know this drawing-room. When I came to my favourite place I found a book lying on the rock—on my own special rock. Pandora isn't in it with me for curiosity, so I opened the book and saw the name on the fly-leaf—the book was marked and annotated: of course I read it: every sentence that was marked fitted itself to some thought of mine like music to words. When I met him—the man—our souls flew together. Before the summer was over *we* were over—that is, it was all over with us! He is a minister and a minister's son—as poor as poverty; he has nothing but his salary, six hundred dollars a year: he has taken a little parish in the northern part of Vermont. Think of it!—six hundred a year—fifty dollars a month for two per-

sons! I have decided to do the daring splendid thing—to share his fate."

"Happy man!" said John.

"O Mr. Wright, you are so sympathetic and comprehending. Yes, I have decided to go to him and live on a crust——"

"What a romance! I always knew you were especially made to be a minister's wife."

"How discerning of you! I am; I expect to do fine work in the parish; for one thing I will have the old ladies to supper on sewing-circle nights, but 'though on pleasure bent I have a frugal mind'; therefore, I mustn't spend money on clothes, must I? So it will be economy—in fact, it will be a necessity—to wear my old gowns, won't it? What do you think the old ladies will say to this one?"

John considered the delicate gown with straps of pearls on the shoulders and with a slight pretence of chiffon for sleeves, the slit skirt showing fascinating slippers with extreme high heels and the diaphanous stockings that matched her gown.

"They will be mad with delight," he said with enthusiasm: "they will all beg for the model, and at the next sewing-circle you will find all the old ladies dressed in gowns exactly like it."

"How lovely, Mr. Wright! How you *do* understand things! What joy to set the fashion for the dear old Christians! Imagine forty—Jim says there are forty—nice old country women all dressed just like this!" She made a dainty little



movement of her slippered foot at the opening of her skirt. John laughed: a merry twinkle came into his eyes in spite of his pain.

Sally looked up at him demurely:

"Don't you think that it is a beautiful romance?"

"I find it very amusing."

"Amusing?—*amusing?* Is that the way you regard the great drama of two loving hearts?"

"That is the way I regard your creative genius, Miss Sally."

"Creative genius? Upon my word! *Then you don't believe it?*"

"Do you?" said John.

Sally laughed. All at once a sweet seriousness —a lovely earnestness fell upon her: she looked at John with a new expression that stirred his aching heart.

"Mr. Wright, please forgive my nonsense! You are awfully good sport! You are such good sport that I must *really and truly* confide in you! It is a profound secret. We are doing everything we can to keep it secret. We don't intend to tell it until May—and then we intend to announce it with a flare of trumpets!—but I want *you* to know, now—this very moment! I *am* engaged:—but it is to Pelham Vinton!"

To John's face came a generous glow of pleasure.

"Miss Sally! I am *so* glad for him!—and I

am glad for you, also,—Pelham Vinton is a fine fellow—a very fine fellow!"

"I have wanted dreadfully to tell you, Mr. Wright, because it began one night at *your* house —I have known him always, of course, but *it* began that night. I think you have an uncanny sense of things, and you *sensed* that we belonged to each other—and we do—Oh, we do!" A deeper note had come into Sally's merry voice and John, looking at her, thought he had never realised before how very pretty she was.

"Pelham happens to be rich—absurdly, abominably rich—but, Mr. Wright, what I said at dinner is true, absolutely true."

"I am sure of it, Miss Sally."

"If Pelham lost everything he had in the world, to-morrow—I shouldn't care one snap—Oh, yes, I'd be sorry—but I mean—I'd——" she hesitated.

John finished the sentence for her: "You *'would rather live on a crust with the man you love than live in lavish luxury with a man you don't love.'* "

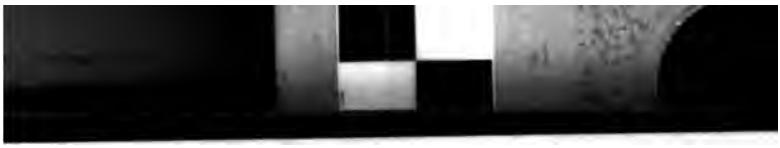
The colour rushed to Sally's cheeks:

"You really *did* hear what I said at dinner, didn't you?"

"Yes," John answered seriously, "I heard it and I believe it—And oh! I wish you joy!"

Young Merrill came up to speak to Sally and John left them.

"Poor dear!" Sally thought, looking after



John: "He's fearfully worried about something. I don't like the look in his eyes at all, *at all;* I have never seen him look so before:—it is tragic; but, anyway, I made him smile—a minister's wife! *A minister's wife!* Imagine me a minister's wife!"

"What are you smiling at so mysteriously, Miss Sally?" said young Merrill, watching her admiringly.

"I was thinking how amusing it would be if we could dance: let us ask Mrs. Barton if we may?"

"But, Miss Sally, how are we to——"

"Now don't begin to find obstacles, Clarence: every man should learn to 'carry the message to Garcia': there is always a way to do *everything* that one really desires to do: you and I can go into the ball-room—and if there is no one to play, you can whistle—and if you can't, *I can.*"



CHAPTER XXII

PAIN was new to John: in all his life he had never known pain, with the exception of his childish grief when his mother died: restlessness, impatience, disappointment, rebellion,—these he had called pain, but the daily gnawing ache of the heart, the hunger and thirst of the spirit, he had never known before: he found it difficult to adjust himself to the torture.

Mighty forces battled within him: all external things lost their flavour. John's very quality increased his capacity for suffering: the tempestuous impetuousness of his temperament made his suffering—when it came to him—a veritable tragedy. The very power which made his charm worked against him in his anguish. The more he kicked against the pricks the more inevitable they were; the more he felt the iron of bondage enter his soul, and the more conscious he was of his bondage, the more desperate he became.

His love for Marion had been cumulative in its gathering force. He knows now that it had always been a part of his very being: but it had been hidden by earth-clouds as the mountain heights are hidden by the dull mists that rise from the valley.



It had been gaining momentum in the silence: and at last, like the avalanche from the Alpine height, it had come—a mighty torrent, unresistible, unconquerable—inundating all the dry and waste places of his soul.

In his desperation he tried to build up barriers against it, but they could no more stand against the torrent than sticks of straw could stand against the rushing avalanche which tears down the mountainside when the ice is broken.

John was powerless and, worst of all, he had only himself to blame: he, a sane man, had connived at his own destruction: he, a rational human being, had yielded to the temptation of material desire: he, a philosopher,—he grinned sardonically as he remembered that he used to fancy himself a philosopher!—had been the merest puppet of the grossest of all temptations—the greed for gold!

Sometimes he had a boyish impulse to flay himself, to kick himself: sometimes a sullen heart-sick dulness depressed him: sometimes a passionate self-hatred would oversweep him because he had fallen so far from his dream of life—and had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage!

He had not realised that birthright, and he had not known what he was doing at the time, but he had sold *his future,* he had cut himself off from what might come, from life's possibilities, and he had done it *for gold!* There was that in John which made the enormity of the transaction

greater in his case, because he had, at heart, lofty standards of measurement: he had gone with the world and had accepted the world's standards, but he recognised others, and in his poignant moments of reality those other standards asserted themselves: his suffering was greater than any one could understand because there was in it the worst of all evils—the sting of self-reproach. Few men could have understood what he was suffering, even had they known the facts.

"Poor devil!" he heard a man say one day about a broker who had killed himself. "One can't blame him: he was cleaned out—he had lost every penny of his fortune: what's a fellow to do?"

Men understood the desperation of a man suffering from *material* loss, but John's desperation would have been less comprehensible: and yet he had lost the essence of all things—the breath of life itself.

John was born to be a mighty lover—this he had always known: from his earliest boyhood he had felt the power within himself: the answering response in his heart to the poet's song, the conscious glow within himself, responding to the poet's words of love, had always made him tremble for the day when it should come to him.

Passion had often swayed him, but always in the moments of sensuous delight he had known that he was capable of something far beyond it—a great love of which passion would be but the



handmaiden: a sharp recoil had come to him at moments even in his affair with Mrs. Winthrop, because he missed the mighty reality: he was always saying to himself, "What will LOVE be when it comes?"

And Love had come!

Day after day he fought his battle for self-control against the inroads of his misery, he got himself in hand, of course, and gained an outward poise—for he was in all things manly—but he could not as yet find the inward poise against his pain that gained in magnitude as time went on: he knew that Marion would write no word in answer to his cry: he understood her pride, and his pride in her was proud of that pride: but yet he held with nervous tension to the hope that the *unexpected* would happen—that a letter would arrive: he went to sleep thinking it might come on the morrow: and he awoke to watch for the postman, wondering if it would be there in the morning. He knew that Marion had received his letter—for Eben had written to him that he had placed it in her hand: day after day he waited, and no letter came: night after night he watched, and no letter came. He told himself that it was natural she should not speak, natural she should draw her skirts away from the approach of such a one as he—but love is tenacious and he hoped against hope. The weeks went on and at last he was obliged to accept the inevitable, and to forgo his treasured hope.

He, who had been so eager, so keen, so full o buoyant zest for life and for delight, knew, a last, that bitterness was his portion: and tha henceforth he must circle his heart and his lif with silence.

In the midst of his suffering a new and hamper ing trial overtook him, his magnificent physica strength failed him: he, who had been the env of all his friends because of his superb vigour an vitality, became one of the host of men whom h had despised: he had always had an impatien intolerance for those men who complained tha they felt "seedy," "rocky," "measly," "of their feed": these unpleasant expressions ha grated against his fastidious taste: and now h found himself using them of *himself*.

His habitual healthy, restful sleep of forgetful ness played truant: he tossed through long hours night after night: his appetite failed: and on day to his surprise he found himself with sharp physical pain, which was as new to him as menta pain: after that, severe headaches came to b trying and familiar things: he had never know a headache in his life, and he suffered severely John was well co-ordinated; therefore, menta pain must inevitably affect his physique, thereby increasing the mental pain by reflex action: at th same time the physical upset became more un bearable because of the continuing mental strain

"I am getting to be like all the other seedy ol duffers," he said to himself in disgust.



He tried taking whiskey, but as it made his headaches worse, he stopped: he tried going into the country: that helped him, but just as he began to feel better he had to come back to fulfil his obligations according to the terms of the will: he decided in disgust that it did not pay to go.

"I am more bound than a clerk in a country store," he said to himself bitterly: "because *he* can be late if he wants to, and lose his job: I can't lose my job! I am bound to it hand and foot!"

And so the days dragged themselves on to May. One bright day he went to a florist's to order flowers for the various hostesses to whom he was indebted: there he was confronted with an invoice of blossoms, just brought from the country: great boughs of fresh apple blossoms lay upon the dark counter—the breath of the Spring was wafted from their pink and white petals.

He groaned in spirit, abruptly left the place and hastened to unfamiliar city streets and there walked and walked: when next he looked at his watch, he found that he had been walking the streets for four hours. That night the pain in his head was intolerable.

CHAPTER XXIII

"Is Mrs. Barkley at home, Perkins?"

"No, Sir. She's gone out, Sir," answered the spruce footman. There was a look of relief on John's face: he admired and liked Mrs. Barkley tremendously and he was more at home with her than with any woman in New York: but to-day he wanted to get away from his familiar world; his mood was feverish, almost desperate: his life seemed unendurable.

A short talk with Mrs. Barkley had been the price he was willing to pay for the comfort he sought: now he could have that comfort without the price.

"I should like to see Master Bobbie then, Perkins, if he may come down."

"Yes, Sir. I will call Master Bobbie, Sir. He'll be that glad to see you, Sir. He's awful fond of you, Sir."

"Thank you, Perkins."

"Every one can see it, Sir."

John went into the homelike room and waited. A new hunger had come into his heart—a child-hunger. A wild uncontrollable desire for a son possessed him. Following his conscious love for Marion, this new pain had begun to eat into his



being. He had been overwhelmed by his loss of the woman he loved: but now, also, he had come to know another loss, a tragic realisation of the loss of children whom he had forfeited.

It was indicative of the warmth of John's nature that he had an intense love for children, and it was a proof of his crystalline sincerity that children always loved and trusted him: but this personal hunger for a son of his own was new to him. He had chosen—God help him!—he had *chosen*—the luxurious, the easy way of life, without thought of the ultimate future.

He had become acutely aware that, even in its personal equation, life is a far-reaching thing—something bigger and vaster than ease, luxury, pleasure: he knew now that every real man desires to pass on to posterity the inherent forces, the inherited life that is his: even a man's name has an added dignity, an added value, if that name may be passed on: John's name would die with him and the place thereof would know it no more.

There was a swift step in the hall and Bobbie came bounding in. He was a slender, straight little fellow, dressed in a close-fitting suit of white; his nimble feet—which seemed to twinkle—were in low patent-leather pumps, and his little legs above the short white socks were bare: he had a shock of golden curls and wide dark eyes.

He threw himself upon John with trusting familiarity, and John felt a throb of delight: he

was convinced that this desperate impulse to see Bobbie had been a wise one.

"How do you do, Monsieur? Betty is having her hair cu'led and she can't come down—will you 'cuse her, Monsieur?"

"Certainly," said John, relieved that he could have Bobbie all to himself: "How is Betty Bobs?"

"Oh, she's all wight, and so is Favver, and so is Muvver: Muvver's gone to play on the bwidge."

The letter R was Bobbie's verbal stumbling-block.

"To play on the bridge?"

John understood but it amused him to lead Bobbie on to explanation.

"Yes, Monsieur, Muvver plays on the bwidge most evewy day and she finds beautiful pwizes on the bwidge. She almost always, gen'wally, gives them to Bobbie only 'cept when they are silly girl-things, then she gives them to Betty—hat pins and cushions and things a man can't use."

"Tell me, Bobs, what kind of things *can* a man use?"

"Oh, lots of things—ponies and monkeys and lots of things."

John obeyed a hungry impulse.

"Will you come and live with me, Bobs? You shall have them all."

"And leave Muvver?"

"I want a little boy very much."

"Is that why you've got such a sad look in the back of your eyes, to-day?" asked Bobbie sympathetically, coming closer to John.

"Have I a sad look? Well—yes—that's the reason. If you will come home with me I will give you a beautiful pony—a real circus pony—and a fine funny monkey like the one at the Zoo."

Bobbie drew away from John: his little figure straightened proudly:

"Monsieur," he said seriously, "I wouldn't leave my Muvver for a thousand million ponies nor for evewy monkey in the Bwonks."

"Good for you, Bobs! You are a man after my own heart. You are loyal! Do you know what loyal means?"

"Yes, I know, Monsieur. It's the Loyal Legion: Babbette's beau is one."

"To be loyal, Bobs, means to be true to your friends."

Bobbie looked at John with earnest eyes.

"Nobody is ever *un*loyal—is they, Monsieur?"

John gave a start: he spoke almost without volition—it seemed to him as though a stranger was speaking through him.

"What would you say, Bobs, to a man who was so *un*loyal that he sold his little boy for money?"

Horror and dismay came on the child's face:

"Sold his little boy for money?"

"Who was so unloyal," John went on, "that he ran away from the one he loved best."

"To get ponies and monkeys and things?"



Here was a home thrust.

"Yes, Bobs, there are some boys so base and bad that they run away from those they love just to get ponies and monkeys and THINGS."

"What howible bad boys—they're most as bad as Bluebea'd."

John was anxious to escape from the look which he had brought into Bobbie's eyes.

"Who was Bluebeard, Bobs?"

"Why, don't you know Bluebea'd? He had lots of wives—most a hundwed, I think—and he put them all in one woom and killed them all—evewy one!"

"How HORRIBLE!" John's dramatic sympathy rose to meet Bobbie's artistic demand as a narrator.

"Yes, *evewy* one—evewy *single* one!"

After a pause, which Bobbie's dramatic sense made sufficiently long to allow John to fully feel the enormity of Bluebeard's crimes, he added:

"When I'm gwowed up to be a man I'm going to mawy lots and *lots* of girls, too, only I won't kill them—I'll keep them all, *evewy one*—I'll keep one in one woom, anuver in anuver woom and anuver in anuver woom: then if one has a headache I've got anuver one—and if she's gone to play on the bwidge, I've got anuver one;—and if she's cwoss, I've got anuver one; and *she* might be nice and cuddly—mightn't she, Monsieur?"

"Young man," said John, "you are a Solon and a Solomon: you make of polygamy a fine art."

"Monsieur," said Bobbie, nestling closer to him, "I ain't gwowed up yet—I'm *almost* gwowed up but not *quite,* and I don't un'astand big wowds—Oh, yes—I know lots of big wowds—the wowds Muvver and Favver say—but not *gweat big* wowds like you said."

"You are grown up enough for me. If you won't come and live with me and be my son, will you be my friend, Robert?"

Of all things Bobbie loved it was to be called Robert: it made him feel very important and like Father.

"Your *intimate* fwiend?"

"My intimate friend."

"Yes, Monsieur: I'll be your intimate fwiend."

There was a stately dignity in the lift of the curly head as Bobbie held out his hand. John felt he had seldom known a more solemn compact than when he took Bobbie's tiny hand in his own.

"And may I depend on you, Robert, and come to you when I need a friend to help me?"

" 'Course," Bobbie was emphatic—"a fwiend is always weady to help a fwiend—that's what Muvver says. A fwiend never goes back on a fwiend—that's what Favver says."

"Then it's a bargain. We are friends now for fair." John spoke with eagerness.

"Cwoss your hawt," said Bobbie, making a cabalistic sign over his little white breast, whereupon John reverently went through the ceremony.



"My friend Robert, will you grant me a favour?"

" 'Course," said Bobbie, "that's what fwiends always do."

"Will you dine with me?"

Bobbie's face fell:

"Oh, I'm not 'lowed to sit up to dinner! I have to go to bed at seven o'clock—I always have to undwess for bed *just* the time that Muvver is undwessing for dinner."

John assumed an air of dramatic protest.

"You don't suppose, Sir, I would ask a friend to dine with me, and *forget his habits*, do you? I know you dine in the middle of the day—didn't I come to dine with you the day we went to the Bronx? Dinner shall be at your own hour, if you will give me the pleasure of your company."

"Oh, Bully! Bully!" shouted Bobbie: then he checked himself, and added with a ceremonious little air of formality:

"Thank you, Monsieur. It will give me gweat pleasure—that's what Muvver says, when peoples ask her!"

"We will have a jolly day, Robert, and you shall see the pony that I bought for you."

"Oh!" A shadow fell on the sensitive little face.

"That's all right—Robert—I have bought it already: I was only in fun when I asked you to leave Mother—I wouldn't have you leave Mother for anything—but you are to have the pony and

the monkey just the same. I got the pony a week ago and Brown—you know Brown, my coachman—is training it for you until you go to the country: it's a *beauty!*"

Whereupon, Bobbie being a normal boy, indulged in shouts and jumps and loud expressions of delight.

After a brief talk of half an hour the friends bade each other good-bye. John, with a lighter—if a heavier—heart ran down the stone steps of the house. Suddenly he was aware of some one gazing at him steadily and unpleasantly; he turned and saw the man with the evil face and the shifty bloodshot eyes who had stopped him that winter morning on his way to the Metropolitan Museum. The man stood about thirty feet away from the Barkley house.

John, instinctively and unconsciously, hastened his steps—impelled by a kind of psychic recoil: it urged him to hurry away: he walked about fifty feet—then he checked himself:

"Not a second time," he said to himself, "I will not run away a second time from that wretched creature: the first time it was because I had an engagement and was late—but this time it is purely a case of nerves: I will not allow myself to have this sense of disgust for any fellow-being; we are all miserable—he in his way—I in mine."

An intense newborn desire to help this pitiable object surged within John.

"I *will* bring a happier look to that wretch face:" he turned with friendly impulse—and there was no one to be seen! Up and down t street John looked—the man was gone! The du was beginning to fall but he could plainly s the street for several squares in either directio no one was in sight. John hurried to the ne house—before which the man had been standing and peered over the railing into the area; no o was there, he had vanished as absolutely as if h had been a grim shadow: no trace of any livin creature was where the man had stood an instar before.

Something colder than coldness passed ove John—his flesh rose, a clammy shiver crept i and out of the roots of his hair.

"What nonsense"—he muttered impatiently— "my nerves are rotten! I am getting morbid."

With challenged self-control he threw off th haunting shudder—the unpleasant picture of th man—and walked briskly on thinking of his loy little intimate friend.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Isn't this bully, John? It's the very thing for you. It will get some ozone into your lungs and banish the blue devils—you are no more like yourself these days than a mope is like a magpie."

Ted Remsen spoke with his usual airy inconsequence, a kind of monologue which demanded no answer.

It was a fresh dewy July morning: Ted and John had come, at Ted's solicitation, for a tramp in the mountains. With the instinctive intuition that the careless have at times, Ted was conscious of the feverish state in which John's nerves had been of late and of a gradual increase of mental depression; it had given him much concern. John had always won Ted's enthusiasm, because of his splendid balance and his superb self-control: this restlessness was entirely new, and it awakened questions and anxieties in Ted: that it was not apparent to those who saw John, on the polished surface, Ted knew, but the very effort which John made to conceal it made it the more alarming to Ted's intuitive penetration.

Ted Remsen was a buoyant, breezy creature, taking life without serious contemplation or analysis, but he was quick to perceive, and he was a



staunch friend, bringing into his friendship the same bright qualities, the same gay tactics that made him a favourite in society. He could not follow the serious problems and phases of a deeper and more complex nature; of clouds that come from tragedies of the soul he knew little: but let a fellow be in trouble and Ted was sure to be there, to chat with him, to cheerfully bully him, to playfully badger him, until the cloud vanished.

Although Ted had always been fascinated by John, he could not understand nor follow him in the subtleties and complexities of his temperament: and he had been happy to find that John had apparently gotten away from his early habit of analysis and introspection. Ted had never found John more congenial and companionable than during the last two years when John seemed to have gotten over his "tiresome trick of thinking"—as Ted had called it—and rode gaily on the crest of the wave: but for the last three months the old habit had fallen upon John again, emphasised by a restlessness which was entirely new: at Harvard Ted used to say, "Now, John Wright, you are playing chess with your mind again: are you trying to checkmate the devil, that you study the board of life as you do? Chuck it! What difference does it make if two and two make four or twenty-two—it will be all the same a hundred years from now. Come, and have a drink."

But since John had come to New York, to Ted's

great relief, he had been altogether different until lately: "Now, he is up to his old College tricks again," said Ted to himself, "thinking and puckering up his forehead: and he's sad besides: he has been *so* jolly and normal for two years!"

Ted's faithful friendship made frantic effort to get in touch with what he could not comprehend, and to that end he employed his usual methods, which made him an intolerable nuisance to John at the same time that he really was a comfort.

Ted gave him no peace until he reluctantly consented in July to run North for a week-end tramp. They had come to the Adirondacks and were setting off for a mountain climb, on the first morning of their stay. It was a wonderful day! The dew was sparkling on the grass—the birds were singing, great fleecy clouds were crowning the mountains which were strong in the strength of the sun; the air was fragrant with the pungent, spicy odours of balsam and pine.

John felt the returning glow of virile life leaping in his veins as he tramped, and his tired nerves were braced as he breathed the clear Northern balsam-laden air.

Ted turned upon John suddenly:

"Say, old fellow, what's been the matter with you, anyway?"

"The matter with me?" John said nonchalantly.

"Oh, come off! you know what I mean. What's this 'black bat thing' that's settled upon you lately?"

"Nothing," said John sententiously.

"Nothing? Rot! Can't you give a straight an swer to a straight question from a fellow?"

"I've had frightful headaches, that's all—neve had a headache in my life before—it's altogethe physical."

Ted looked at him critically.

"Rubbish! A fellow that was Captain of th crew at Harvard and has your build doesn't hav headaches for *nothing!* it may be headaches tha make the trouble, but what's the trouble tha makes the headaches? That's the rub."

"Is there any trouble?" John said carelessly "I am sure I don't know what it is."

"Chuck it, John! 'Why should the spirit o mortal be proud' with his chum? Nobody els can see it: you're as effectual in hiding your dark deep secrets as though you were made in Ger many: you might be a side-splitting clown in a circus, for all the trouble you show to the world but you can't fool your Uncle Dudley; you've got the blue devils under your light and debonair man ner and no mistake! and I *intend* to know what it is!"

"Do you?" said John quietly: "let me know what it is when you find out."

Then silence fell: John walked briskly, with out speaking. Ted kept step beside him and looked at him out of the corners of his eyes: a proud reserve had fallen upon John: every trace of nervous tension had apparently vanished.

"My word! what a swell he is!" Ted said to himself: "He looks like Jupiter or one of those old Olympian duffers—I look like thirty cents beside him: no one would ever think of putting Ted Remsen amongst the Olympian lot! A man who can hold his tongue and look such a blasted swell, when he wants to, is a crackerjack: doesn't he look a stunner? I was a fool to butt in like that and ask questions—I wish I could learn to hold my tongue but I never can, the question is out before I know it! I hope to Heaven he isn't in a huff."

At that moment John turned and laid his hand on Ted's arm:

"Ted, you're a brick! The most loyal friend a man ever had." And then he changed the subject—"Isn't it a glorious day?"

"The day's all right," shouted the relieved Ted, and forthwith conversation turned into old and familiar channels with pauses of quiet as the two men climbed up and up the stony path of the mountainside through the thick tangle of the forest fresh with morning dew.

When they reached the mountain top John's nerves tingled, his lungs filled and a sense of buoyant well-being possessed him. For a moment he felt as though he and Ted were Freshmen once more in the early Harvard days: he stretched out his arms, and drew in great draughts of the clear, untainted air.

The mountains lay majestically around them

with fleecy cloud-drifts upon their summits a
their sides: beautiful green valleys ran betwe
the mountains, they were dotted with fa
houses which made them homelike, giving a tou
of human life to the austere beauty: a friend
lake of living sapphire gleamed in the sun: t
clear, keen air had that quality which sooth
and braces the lungs and the heart, opening i
arteries and sending the blood in rhythmic flow
the brain.

"Ted, I feel better," said John as he breath
deep, expanding his chest.

"Hurrah! I knew you would," cried the d
lighted Ted.

John threw himself on one of the high rocks th
commanded the restful and arousing view.

"Ted," he said, "wasn't it wonderful wh
practical truths those old Greeks put into the
myths? Take the story of Antæus, for example-
he was strengthened every time he touched Moth
Earth, no matter what the fight had been—and
am I." John looked hungrily at the mountain
"I feel like a new man when I touch Her."

"Well, why don't you stay on here a week
two," said Ted, "with your old Mammy? She
dying to hold you in her mighty arms awhi
longer. It would do you good: say, old chap, I
stay with you, if you say so."

"I can't, Ted."

"Why the devil can't you?"

"Because," John spoke bitterly, "I'm dragg

back to stones and mortar and city streets by the inexorable Dead Hand."

"Holy smoke! how uncanny!"—and Ted looked around him as though he were looking for the dead hand in a way that made John smile.

"My head ached so last month I let everything go—and I was just about to attend to my duties this month when you butted in and took me off, so I have double work to do."

"Aren't you glad I did butt in?"

"You bet I am!"

They opened their knapsacks and spread their breakfast on a rock. Ted had brought a little spirit-lamp and warmed the coffee and boiled the eggs. John ate with an appetite that did Ted good.

"This is a bully breakfast-party, John!"

"The best ever," assented John.

They laughed and talked like boys. When breakfast was over they smoked—remembered—and were silent.

"To think we have only one more tramp!" John spoke regretfully.

"Well, we've got that at any rate," replied Ted cheerfully; "don't let us think beyond to-morrow—to-day and to-morrow."

"And after that—what?" said John, looking far off over the mountains.

There came a time when Ted remembered, with an unbearable pang, the tones in John's voice as

he said—"And after that—what?" They took things lazily, leisurely, until ten-thirty, then they started on the downward tramp.

In a mossy, sheltered place on the mountainside they found a bubbling spring and stopped to drink: from the pathless forest there came the sound of a thrush's song.

"Hear that thrush! My word! but he's a dandy! It beats the Metropolitan singers all hollow"—and Ted Remsen pricked up his ears.

A bitter memory rushed over John at Ted's words. With mental precision he swiftly weighed the comparative, relative value of things.

The Opera House,—curtained, gorgeous, glittering, fashionable, stifling, under a benumbing spell—of which the spell of the music is but a small part—the beautiful women, blazing in jewels and in diaphanous garments, with languid airs and heavy-lidded eyes, temptation lurking in their depths, the low words, the subtle fragrance from soft garments and from fair white flesh—rousing the physical senses.

The Morning on the Mountainside—fresh, crisp air, clean and crystal-clear, the shining sun sparkling in splendour, the spacious spaces of the wide blue sky, the upward climb to the heights, where the secrets of the universe are whispered to the inner ear of those who listen—the fragrance of the immemorial pines, with their low murmuring music that cannot be reproduced by any human

note, and a happy thrush singing its heart out to the morning sky.

"Ah!" said John as he tramped on, breathing deep the pine-laden air.

CHAPTER XXV

Two days later John was seated in a little suffocating room, partitioned off with glass, in the Safe Deposit Vaults: his securities and valuable business papers were spread out before him.

In a tense and nervous way he was impatiently going through them. It was suffocatingly hot and John was tired: he had dismissed his assistants an hour before because he could not stand the smug smiles on their complacent faces as they cut off coupons with zest. His teeth were set; his face was a grim protest; all his being was hungering and thirsting for green fields and out-of-doors—and most for the mountain top he had left for this sordid task—and yet he was inexorably held in the barren and arid prison of stone and mortar, in the stifling, sweltering vortex of New York—and it was July!

"Somewhere," he said between shut teeth, "fresh breezes are blowing, the sky is blue! Somewhere a thrush is singing, and here I sit in a vault, a *living dead man* in a tomb. Bah! It is unendurable—steel floors, steel doors, steel walls, and instead of the sky, a roof of steel! Marion was right! I *am* a dead man—a conscious dead man who cannot be decently buried. Good God. A

stone vault in a cemetery would be better than a steel vault in a sky-scraper: there, at least, one could look out through the gratings of the vault on grass and sky: but here there is nothing but steel on every side—relentless, inexorable, hideous steel! and instead of picking mountain flowers I am cutting coupons—cutting coupons—cutting coupons. I LOATHE them!"

He knew that his nerves were out of order; but how can a strong man bear pain incessantly, lose his sleep continually and not feel it, at last, in his nerves? There were so many kinds of pain, so many kinds of irritation he had to bear: just now there was the added pang of this hunger and thirst for the wide, open country: he loved the country; even when it was ice-bound and snow-covered, it fascinated and drew him: but in the flowering summer time it seemed an absolute necessity: he had not realised how vital a part of life it was to him! he suffered acutely, mentally and physically, especially to-day after his hours of distasteful work. He pushed his securities aside and put his hand to his head, which was aching savagely: a numb listlessness came over him: his chief sensation was one of relief that those tiresome clerks had gone and that—even if he had to be in this steel prison—at least he was alone.

"May I come in?"—The sweet, low voice at the door startled John like a shrill trumpet-blast: for a moment he lost his poise, but social armour

is a ready protection and John's was close at hand, though he had laid it aside for a moment: quickly he pulled himself together and put it swiftly on again: it was his most suave and charming self who opened the little glass door to admit —Ameda Winthrop!

She looked unusually attractive in her bright summer garments, her smart hat a riot of nodding flowers and her delicate lace veil a softener, an emphasiser of her beauty.

"Welcome, Mrs. Winthrop," John said, graciously: "Fate has sent you on an errand of mercy to cheer an arduous task."

She smiled alluringly:

"I had to come when I heard that you were here."

The sharp surprise as of the trumpet-note had passed and John's æsthetic taste was soothed and caressed by her musical voice.

"How delightful that our respective vaults should be so near," she continued: "I have been putting away my diamonds before we leave for California. Oh, I *wish* you would go with us! I have kept your place in the car free, so that you may change your mind any moment. Horace would be charmed."

"Thank you, but, as I wrote you, it is quite impossible for me to get away."

"I am so disappointed!" she looked around the room: "Think of my audacity in presuming to interrupt Mr. Crœsus at his imperial task!"

She pouted like a mischievous child who has dared a naughty deed but is sure of pardon and welcome: she put her brilliant sunshade on a chair with the air of one who is at home and has the intention of staying awhile: she walked over to the table and contemplated the papers piled upon it.

"Just look at these heaps and heaps and *heaps* of securities: isn't it *splendid?*" She laughed merrily.

"Splendid?"—John's voice was like the lash of a whip—"I should like to dump them all into the East River."

She arched her delicate eyebrows.

"*Mon Dieu!* What a Nero!" She came nearer to him: "What is it, John?" Her voice became appealing, tender: "What has been the matter with you for the last month or two? Are you ill? Tell me, *mon ami,* are you ill?"

John tossed his head like a restive horse.

"Those things"—he pointed to the table loaded with securities—"are corroding chains! This steel vault is a charnel-house! I worship the God of Nature. I want to lie on the green grass under the wide sky—and be free!"

There was something in his voice that jarred upon the fastidious lady: it held a heat that is not to be tolerated for a moment in the social world—except in affairs of the heart and then only to the woman of the affair.

"Really?"—she spoke with suave sweetness—"in the orchard—at dawn?"

"Yes,"—said John quietly—"in the orchard—at dawn."

Instantly—after months of alternating hope and fears, of self-deception and intuitive perception, Ameda Winthrop knew the truth. Her eyes narrowed unpleasantly; they had a colder glint of green.

"There is a woman in the orchard—perhaps?"

John lifted his head imperiously: the outer covering of reserve which he had worn since he came to New York and which had become a very part of him, suddenly dropped from him: with unconscious pride he said in quiet tones:

"It is true—there is a woman in the orchard—a girl as beautiful as the morning and as pure as the dew!"

Mrs. Winthrop looked at him steadily for a moment, then shrugged her Parisian shoulders.

"Indeed! How very romantic—how very poetic!"

She took her sunshade from the chair and smoothed its flowery folds.

"I fear, Mr. Wright, I am keeping you from your task: I will not longer disturb you. Good afternoon."

She bowed with inimitable grace. John opened the door for her.

"Thank you for coming, Mrs. Winthrop, to brighten this boredom."

"Thank you for your charming confidence," Mrs. Winthrop's voice was treacherously sweet, "my congratulations. Ah, I forgot—you cannot marry."

"No," said John, "I cannot marry."

When she was alone in her motor, Ameda Winthrop snapped together her small white teeth.

"Holy Virgin!" she said: "His eyes—when he spoke of her! He can love! Ah! he *can* love! I should like to meet that girl—and—and—strangle her!"

When he had closed the glass door behind Mrs. Winthrop, John sat down at the table and leaned his aching head upon his hand.

"That chapter is ended—thank God!"



CHAPTER XXVI

In the month of August a titanic tragedy co fronted the world—a universal deluge of bloc which had increased with each passing mont swept over Europe.

The unbelievable was happening: men had go mad, and were flying at each other's throats: o nation after another nation became involved War.

From across the sea, America, with smug co placency, watched in silence: in silence she look on at the crime of the ages, the crime again heroic Belgium: she drew around her corpule shoulders the mantle of Neutrality, stifling h international conscience which had come to h as an heritage from civilisation—that intern tional conscience which is the proof of the solida ity of mankind.

The swift onrush of ghastly surprises stagger humanity: men looked at one another wonderi if they were sane, if the words they read we true or if it were all only an awful internation nightmare which had all mankind in its fatef grip.

Men went to sleep pondering the incredible, a eagerly waited for the morning when they re



the facts that sounded like fiction, and devoured the news which read like fable, then turned to the voice of the Nation as reflected in the able editorials of the daily journals: never had a crisis in history found the leaders of current thought—the respectable journals of the day—so poised, so serious, so earnest: holding jingoism in leash, keeping hysteria at bay and craven fear controlled, they faced the facts with calm analysis.

It was an afternoon in crisp October. John was walking down Fifth Avenue: his head, usually carried with proud poise, was bent: his eyes were upon the pavement: he was in the grip of what he called his black devils.

The world's great tragedy haunted him. Moreover, he had just come from the funeral of his friend, Kenneth Vandeveer, a fine fellow whom he greatly admired. He had been a pall-bearer and in the midst of the solemn service new thoughts had gripped him, and they still followed him with obstinate persistency—thoughts of the nothingness and futility of all life.

Looking up suddenly he saw he was passing his Club: he remembered that Fairfield Murray was to sail to-morrow for England to go to the front and that Ted had said they were all to meet at the Club at five o'clock for a final farewell.

John had not been to the Club for many weeks and he felt less like it than ever after the solemn hours of the afternoon. Funerals did not depress John, as a rule, but the thoughts that had been

suggested by Vandeveer's funeral, to-day, had wrapt him in a dense depression.

However, he must say good-bye to Murray: it would be easier and quicker to run into the Club for a few moments than it would be to hunt Murray up later. He looked at his watch and, finding it was half-after five, he went in; he found a group of men engaged in earnest conversation as they smoked and drank.

Fairfield Murray, a delightful Englishman whom John liked extremely, was the centre of the group: beside him was another Englishman whom John did not know, personally.

John was welcomed with enthusiasm from one and another as he went toward the group.

"Hello, Wright, glad to see you. Come and have a cocktail."

"Where have you kept yourself, Wright? You're a stranger."

"My word! but it's good for sore eyes to see you!"

"You're just in the nick of time, Wright," this from Ted Remsen, "Murray sails to-morrow."

"So I heard." John turned to Murray and held out his hand, "I came to wish you good luck, Murray."

"I'm jolly glad you've come," said Murray. "We got back from the West as fast as possible: we were miles away from civilisation in camp—you know—we arrived last night."

"I understand that you moved mountains and

prairies to get here in time for to-morrow's ship. Three cheers that you made it! I envy you with all my heart!"

There was a ring of sympathetic fellow-feeling and enthusiasm in John's voice which met a quick response in the faces of the Englishmen: Murray turned to him eagerly:

"Come with us, then! This infernal War is not sectional nor local; it is international—a War of Civilisation against Barbarism, of World-peace against Militarism: it is every civilised man's privilege—not to say duty—to stop the spread of the rabies when a mad dog is loose!"

A glow came to John's face:

"*Wouldn't* I go with you if I could! I should like nothing better."

"Be careful, Wright!" said Mr. Morgan: "Remember, you are a Neutral."

"I am a *man!*" said John hotly, his eyes kindling: "If I could manage it, I'd go with Murray in a second!"

"You?" Ted Remsen laid down his glass and looked at John as though he had been struck. "You, John Wright! I thought you didn't believe in War!"

"I don't! War is an abomination: Arbitration and Disarmament are the only hope of Civilisation: and as we are too stupid and blind to become civilised, the next best thing is to avoid War when we can: it is our duty to maintain a neutral position as long as we can—in so far as fighting is con-

cerned: but it is quite another thing to be silen and acquiescent in the face of gross injustice broken treaties and gigantic wrongs! It make every sense of honour in a man rise up and cr aloud for action, to have our citizens gagged."

"Nobody gags us," said Ted argumentatively.

"It amounts to the same thing," snapped John "there is a pressure brought to bear upon us t make us feel we owe it to the Administration t be silent: we are told that 'we must not rock th boat': that sounds well, but if the waters throug which the boat is going are black with struggling writhing victims who have been knocked ove from another boat, I, for one, prefer to risk rock ing it!"

"Good! Bravo!" cried Murray and the othe Englishman.

"What do you think we should do, Wright?" said Barkley.

"Do?" exclaimed John. "We should protest we owe it to our honour, we owe it to our relation with the brave countries, heroically fighting fo righteousness, for liberty and for democratic prin ciples; we owe it to posterity, to protest!"

"Holy Smoke!" said Ted: "And this is the ma who has fought bloody fights with me because believe in War and he doesn't!"

"The time will come, Remsen," said John "when no man will believe in War: when War wil seem as futile to a civilised being as duelling does but, War or no War, the United States should b

recorded on the pages of history for all time with an unmistakable, unequivocal protest!"

"What good would protest do," said Ted, "unless we fight?"

"It would define our moral standard: it would make it clear to the world, and—what is more important—make it clear to ourselves. Think of what we are letting pass in silence before our eyes! A Treaty has been torn to scraps and denied: an international obligation—in which we have our share, even if only indirect—has been denied:—Belgium has been outraged! The people of Belgium are a peaceful, industrious, self-governing people—friends of all the world, admired by all the world: even the atrocities of the Congo have been atoned for by the present king, who is a hero! Belgium has been invaded—its inhabitants have been conquered and slaughtered—its women have been outraged—its children have been mutilated—its priests have been shot—its churches have been defiled and destroyed! It is the crying duty of every civilised nation to proclaim a horror of this cruelty, this breach of faith, this wanton barbarism."

"What should we do?" said Barkley.

"I think," replied John, "that we should instantly sever all relations with Germany, diplomatic, commercial and social: we should register on the pages of history, with indelible ink, our disapproval, our horror and our protest."

"And what then?" said Ted.

"Then we should take the consequences!"

"The consequences would be War!"

"I don't believe it," said John; "but even so!- there is only one righteous logic to our cod There should be one of two alternatives—eithe we should bravely disarm and rely upon spiritu and moral force alone—or, if we insist upon mai taining an army and navy, let us use that arm and navy to help *the side of righteousness* in great moral issue."

"Then you say you would recklessly plunge th Nation into War!" said a man who had bee listening to John, as so many men listen with preconceived idea of what the speaker intend to say and a personal interpretation of what h did say.

"Pardon me, Sir, I have just said *precisely* th reverse," John spoke somewhat impatiently: "A you seem to have misunderstood—I will repeat- I do *not* think it is our national duty to fight: o the contrary, it is our duty to avoid fighting: b I think it *is* our duty to *protest,* to make our n tional indignation clear and unmistakable: I d not think this would bring War—I think it wou bring international respect; but if it *should* brin War—then we should accept the consequences. A it is—we may not even speak! We may not eve as individuals express our indignation and ou wrath."

"What are you doing, now, I should like t know?" broke in Ted.

"I am doing what I have refrained from doing for eight weeks, and what I must still refrain from doing publicly. Neutrality is a wise principle, as far as active interference is concerned, but Neutrality of the mind and Neutrality of expression is disintegrating to the intellect and to the morals: a Neutrality that advises or induces silence about the things that grip the soul and the conscience is a gag! 'Be neutral'—'Be neutral'—Thunder! it makes me tired."

"Hurrah for you!" shouted a jingo-eyed man, in a belligerent tone. "I'm for War, too!"

John turned quickly:

"You have misunderstood me, Sir! *I* am *not* for War! I do not believe in War: I think War is wrong—and worse than wrong—it is idiotic, because through all the ages it has never *permanently* settled anything. War is an economic waste—a barrier to growth—a back-track to evolution! —but I do want justice and I believe in a just sense of proportion. Last winter we coolly shot down three hundred Mexicans—for what?—for the mere mistake of a petty official, after that official had apologised and been punished: and yet in this great moral crisis we indifferently proclaim Neutrality."

"Say, Wright, why don't you hire a hall?" cried Ted, with the reminiscence of college familiarity.

"No hall for me, thank you," said John good-humouredly; "I'm not a speaker—I wish to Heaven I were, for there are some plain truths I should

like to state: but as I am not an orator, I want t express my pent-up feelings in a more primitiv fashion—I want to go with Murray and fight be side dauntless England and fearless France!"

"Oh, I say, come," said Murray eagerly; "w need men like you, Wright! You must manage it As I said, this War is a War of Civilisatio against Barbarism."

"That," said Robert Barkley, "is precisel what Germany says: she maintains it with decisio and unction, one eye lifted to God—and the othe eye squinting to the East!"

"Poor Germany!" said John—a whole-harte sympathy in his tone.

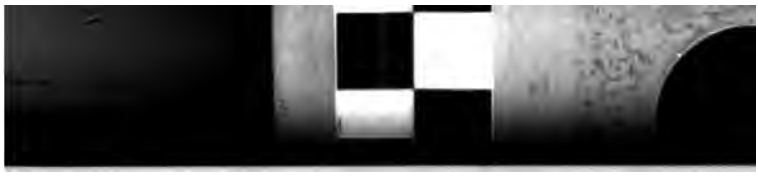
"*Poor Germany?*" echoed Ted: "John, you ar certainly as queer as a quiz!—always were!— you're my best friend and yet I never *can* mak you out! Here you are, one minute wanting t fight Germany and the next minute you're croon ing 'Poor Germany'—'Poor Germany.' "

"It isn't Germany I want to fight, Remsen—it' Militarism!"

"Well, that's the same thing, isn't it?"

"Not at all. This War is not the fault of th German people—it is the fault of Militarism, o Prussianism, of the Hohenzollerns. I think, per- haps, one of the greatest sins of this War is th sin against the mass of honest, upright Germa people. Every one of us owes Germany a debt o gratitude, and we should not forget it."

"I should like to know what you or any on



else owes 'honest, upright Germany,' " said Murray's friend, sarcastically and a trifle aggressively.

"I—for one—owe her an immense debt," John answered. "Beethoven and Wagner are my inspiration—Goethe was my teacher—the German thinkers helped to set me intellectually free!"

"Germany's not setting anybody free just now!" the Englishman responded grimly.

"Right you are! but Prussia isn't Germany!"

"I do not know that it is Prussia alone," said Robert Barkley thoughtfully: "all Germany has *always* harboured the *Hate germ,* and Hate is disintegrating—absolutely fatal for nations as for individuals! Do you remember that scene in 'Faust,' in the Leipsic cellar—where Brander says —'A German can't endure the French to see or hear of'?"

"I do," responded John, "and doesn't it add, 'Yet drinks their wines with hearty cheer'?"

"You bet!" said Murray: "Trust a German to drink, eat or take whatever he wishes—hate, ethics or decency to the contrary, notwithstanding."

He shrugged his shoulders: "It is merely a matter of time, however: Germany will be crushed!"

"Don't be too sure!" said some one: "Germany is hydra-headed and her efficiency is something phenomenal."

John shook his head: "The grim determination and the gallant bravery of the Allies are even

more phenomenal—and, besides, they are 'thric armed' who have their 'quarrel just.' "

A responsive light came into Murray's kee grey eyes—a warmth shone in his habitual reserv and with almost a martial ring resounding throug the quiet of his pleasant English voice, he said

"If the justice of the quarrel makes the strengt of the armaments, then we are *invincible!*" H turned to John—"Will you come, Wright?"

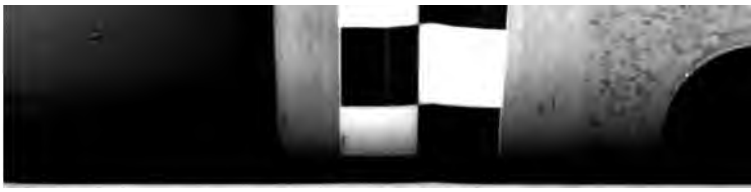
"I cannot," John spoke tensely.

"Don't back out," said the other Englishman trifle snappishly.

"I said it is *impossible* for me to go," answere John with a touch of asperity, and then he adde with quiet dignity, "the reasons which preven me are purely personal, but they are inexorable."

He bade Murray a hearty good-bye, said goo luck to Murray's friend, and went hastily out o the Club: he walked blindly up Fifth Avenue, re sentment seething hot within him.

A bitter rebellion rose in his mind, fiercer tha ever against the slavery which kept him from al freedom of action: freedom seemed to him now th one great good; freedom to go where he would— freedom to do what he would—freedom to be wha he would. Latent forces and virile manhood crie aloud within him for action—for adventure: h longed to follow the bent of his own impulse, hi own compulsion, whatever it might be—he longe for free places and wide spaces—he longed fo liberty—he longed for life!



CHAPTER XXVII

JOHN went to the park and walked until his impatient restlessness changed to a quieter mood. Then wrapped in melancholy he went home.

By good luck he had no evening engagement: he sat alone in state to the formal serving of a dinner which he scarcely ate, then he gave orders that he was not to be interrupted, went up to his den and locked himself in. He lighted a cigar and sat down before the fire, with his misery, to think and to dream. Of old he had been a dreamer of dreams, but then he had dreamed in the fervour of youth—with the delight of hope: now he must dream, hopelessly, of a promised land, the gates of which are barred to him for ever.

He closed his eyes:—on the other side of the hearth, he saw Marion sitting, gracious and beautiful, looking at him with inspiring eyes: her poignant voice was softly reading to him as in the old days when they roamed amongst the classics.

This was home!—a bright fire—a locked door—a Beloved so near that an outstretched hand could touch her—and a secret between them of a little child on the way to her and to him—a little child coming down the pathway of the stars.

He opened his eyes and shuddered!—before him

there was nothing but an empty chair—th
was silent, as silent as the grave—there
touch of feminine softening in the ma
atmosphere of this hateful place. He was
—he would never know that home picture
in dreams. Even if he could soon free h
from bondage, he would not be free to wed.
he was kept from it by cruel conditions to
he had assented, then—as Marion was lost
—he would be kept from it by the obligat
his own nature.

John was no moralist, but he had his own
of sacrilege: marriage without love was sac
to him and children born of a loveless ma
were ethically illegitimate. Whilst life la
must be for evermore alone: his passional n
the tides of his physical manhood must ev
main checked and unfulfilled. Nor could he
enjoy exciting, passing affairs of the hear
sensuous pleasure and the temptation tha
come to him from Mrs. Winthrop had been
real pleasure, a very real temptation, but th
had had a free mind and a free heart: no
mind was possessed, and Marion was o
throne of his heart: any lesser thing woul
against the essence of his being—and bor
to death. And as for the unclean things
other men took, as substitute for wife and
and love—they had no relish for him: as a
matter of temperamental nicety he could n



dure them: he was too fastidious to sip dirty water when he was passionately athirst.

Yes, evermore he must be alone: and John was pre-eminently a social being: it was a desolate outlook.

A hopeless desperation seized him: his heart was as heavy as lead: he got up and paced the floor of his den—back and forth, back and forth he tramped like a trapped animal; in dull despair he went to the bookcase and stopped before the shelves on which there were two rows of worn and battered volumes, long neglected: these were his special treasures—his sacred memorial: they were the books that he and Marion had so often read—sitting under the blossoming boughs of Spring, under the vernal branches of Summer and in the dear old book-room of the Parsonage.

He raised his hand, chose a book by chance and took it down: it was a quaint old volume—a translation from an Eastern philosopher: he let the book open by itself, it was as if he were unconsciously seeking some message from the past: it opened to a marked passage:

"In man's soul lies the power of man—in man's soul shines the star of his own destiny! Strength and serenity are the birthright of the soul: fortitude is its obligation.

"Woe unto the man who, in a universe of worlds, is fretted away by the friction of his own small fate! Arise, O man! Look up! See be-

yond the confines of your own desires: be not ove come by your own despair. Be not a coward the battle of life! Be a victorious Conqueror!"

As one standing in great darkness, by a viv lightning flash, sees in an instant the wide lan scape and the far horizon clearly revealed, so John, in the darkness, flashed forth the truth. H had not won his birthright: he had not fulfille his obligation! he had failed in his high Destin he had been a coward!—and alas! he had been a egotist!

How glibly, in his College days, he had rante against the meanness, the vulgarity of egotisr how eloquently he had urged the duty of a gentl man to forget himself: and what had he been but miserable self-centred egotist? He had concerne himself solely with his own desires, he had squa dered his time and lost his opportunity in selfis pain. First—he had detested his poverty an grumbled at his suffering because he was poo then he had detested his riches and grumbled a his suffering because his riches had brought hi loss!

First—he had basely sold his love for gold- his life for livery! And when he realised wha he had done he had not learned from that failure he had not tried to fulfil the manhood that was le within him nor to redeem the past—he had b gone from *one* error to *another* error, from on unworthy course to another unworthy course: eve



as he had sold *the great opportunity* of life for Possessions—so now he was wasting the other opportunities of life in fruitless fretting and impatient regret. For seven months he had been the victim of despair, the sport of depression—kicked like a football by discontent.

Enough of such cowardice! Within are the issues of life. In his own soul shines the star of his destiny. He will take hold of life and make of it something even yet—money or no money!

Marion shall be proud of him! Soon she shall see in the papers something else of John Remington Wright than the fact that he is a well-dressed millionaire. His old theory comes back to him—the theory which he urged long ago with youthful enthusiasm—that each man is an artist and life is the plastic material in his hand to mould for good or ill. He had thought in the old days that his obligation was to mould material triumph out of circumstance; he knows now his obligation is to mould spiritual triumph out of pain and suffering.

In all things let the soul rise! He will no longer sink in despair, dwell with depression and chafe at personal pain and selfish sorrow: he will triumph! Life shall yet be vital and heroic—in spite of his great mistakes. He does not need to go to the European War to fight—he has a battle to win right here—here will be the valour of contest and here may be the glory of conquest!

The love in his heart is so vast, so vital that it

must not be unto disintegration and destruction: it carries its own obligation to be a creative force unto fruitfulness—unto productiveness. He sees that now with sudden keen perception.

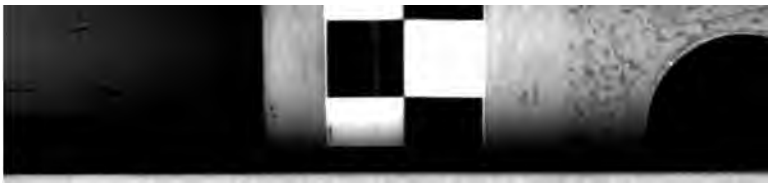
John contemplates no enduring life but influence: his mind cannot grasp the hope of Eternity that Marion was wont to urge with sweet intensity, but this one thing he does believe—he believes in the immortality of influence: he holds that any man who does not leave behind him something vital to strengthen, to help his fellowmen, is a craven:—and he, John, has wilted, whined, shivered and cowered from pain like any craven for *seven* long months!

Now, by all the powers of the universe, he will have done with moaning and with moping.

"Arise, O man!" he said aloud—replacing the old volume on the shelf. As he did so he saw the end of a blue ribbon in a book on the shelf below—a shelf devoted to his well-worn set of Emerson: this time he did not choose by chance: he opened the book at the blue ribbon and read a passage that Marion had marked long ago when she placed the ribbon there; he remembered the day, and her sparkling look as she said—"John, that is absolutely true."

He read the words aloud:

"Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."



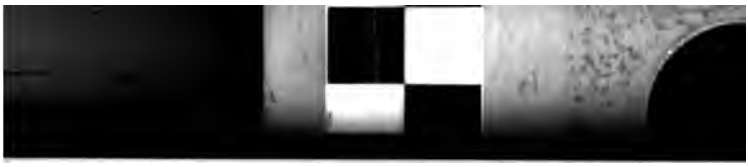
The triumph of principles!—with your heart's desire—or without your heart's desire: the triumph of principles—in a shack where love is—or in an empty mansion, as this is!

John replaced the book and passed his hand tenderly over the backs of the other books as if he were yearning for some familiar human touch: and then he went to bed. He slept that night as he had not slept for half a year.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOHN awoke refreshed. Life was the same of course; it could not change in a night: there came with his awakening the dull familiar pain; the sharp consciousness of loss—the asphyxiating sense of suffocation from the multitude of things about him—and yet everything was different! He had a conscious thrill of adventure and enterprise—something of the thrill that long ago he had felt at Harvard when a race was near—a race which he *intended* to win! Notwithstanding all, he would yet make of life something noble and worth while—money or no money—pain or no pain—headaches or no headaches. He would start on the old quest for the Ideal: That quest could be pursued in the house of splendour as on the lonely farm—even as it could be pursued by Marcus Aurelius in his palace and by Epictetus in his dungeon. Though he had forfeited the highest and though he had put chains of gold upon his feet—though his life had been overlaid by material things—though it had been diverted, for a time, into a false course, yet there was still for him the quest of the Ideal.

John was given as his birthright the adventurous spirit: he had been following, for a time, in



the footpaths of conventionality, but this old adventurous spirit reasserted itself and he knew once more that he *must* follow the Gleam: he had a newborn consciousness that one does not have to go afield for adventure: great adventure may be found at one's door—in one's soul.

As soon as he had breakfasted and gone through his large mail, selecting those letters which needed immediate attention and dictating answers, he sent his Secretary down town with some papers, and told him that after he had delivered them, he need not return—he might take a holiday.

John smiled as he said to himself that he, also, intended to take a holiday. His dear old books called to him: it was as though familiar presences which he had too long neglected were waiting for him.

Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Emerson and many others—who had patiently stood aside during these two hectic years whilst John had been too busy to read, or whilst he was reading fashionable current fiction—turned their faithful old faces toward him, as he entered his den.

To-morrow he would begin to work—not merely the grinding work of the estate but also some vigorous mental work in the forming of a new plan that had come to him during the night:—but to-day he would, as he said, take a *real* holiday—a refreshing bath of renewal: he would get back into his old tonical atmosphere of preparedness for the work he intended to do. He chose from the sacred

shelves the most worn volumes and settled himself in his favourite chair to read. He knew that at the Clubs he would be laughed to scorn for going back to his old-fashioned friends: but in his fierce fight to get his head above the dark waters he needed true books which have stood the test of ages. He felt that just now he could find no help from modern literature—the clever books of the day with the style of the journalist, the ethics of the agnostic, and the philosophy of the pessimist.

He opened his Marcus Aurelius at a marked passage and read:

"Be like the promontory against which the waves continually break, but it stands firm and tames the fury of the water around it. Unhappy am I, because this has happened to me? Not so, but happy am I, though this has happened to me, because I continue free from pain, neither crushed by the present nor fearing the future."

Ah! he will be a promontory—he will no longer be shifting sand! he will yield neither to the low-lapping waves of luxury nor to the high-crested waves of storm—he will——

"Hello! what's that?"

Loud voices talking in the hall below! one of the voices was that of the footman:—a strange lapse! The servants in the house were all well-trained servants, decorous and quiet:

"Stop where ye are! Ye shan't see a piece of

him! not a hair of his head, nor a tail of his coat. Get out! or I'll call the police on ye."

John was amused at the volubility and irritability of the usually quiet and good-tempered footman.

"Call them from Hell! There's none around!" replied a gruff unpleasant voice.

"Then I'll stop ye, meself," shouted the footman.

"You will, will you?"

Evidently the stranger had taken hold of the footman for John heard in a sharp falsetto:

"Let go o' me—let go!"

John went to the head of the stairs and called:

"What's the matter, Furniss?"

"This man, Sir, says he's got to see you, Sir."

"Let him come up."

"O Mr. Wright, Sir—please—Sir—he's—he's —O Sir—don't, Sir."

"Let him come up!" John commanded.

He stepped back into his den and seated himself at his desk: he heard shuffling steps coming up the stairs, and on the instant a dread forecast came to him, he was conscious of an instinctive recoil—he wished that he had not insisted against Furniss' respectful protest: it was too late, however. When the man entered John started—even though he knew he had expected to see him whom he did see: it was the man with the evil face and the shifty bloodshot eyes.

He stood still and stared impudently around

the room as though he were taking an insolent inventory of every detail, and then slunk sideways into the chair indicated by John, who was moved to pity by the man's appearance, his gaunt and hungry look and his ragged clothes. Here was an opportunity to make amends for his inattention and neglect of this wretched creature. John bent his handsome head graciously:

"What may I do for you, my Friend?"

"Your Friend!" There was a disagreeable sneer in the man's tone: "What rot! your *Friend!*"

"Are you in want?" asked John kindly.

"Am I in want? I like that! Take it from me, I'm not at all *in want.* I've got plenty—plenty to eat—plenty to drink—plenty of good clothes—just look at 'em!"—and he pointed to his old torn garments—"I am a bloated bondholder just like you, my *Fr-ie-nd!*"

The tone was indescribable. John's voice was cool and quiet:

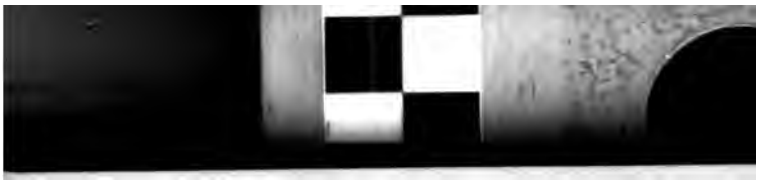
"Did you come here to be impertinent?"

"I came here to talk to you."

"Then talk like a gentleman!"

The man's eyes narrowed; he looked critically at John: he could not decide if he were being considered and advised or taunted and made fun of—he a *gentleman!*

"I've watched you a long time coming and going: and I've read about you; the papers are full of you: they talk about your money—your opera



box—your automobile and your clothes. Men like us *hate* men like you: I HATE you! and I wanted to see what you look like, close to."

He looked at John and John returned the gaze. The eyes of the man were vindictive, hostile—the eyes of John were bright and whimsical.

"It strikes me as odd that you do me the honour of a visit. Men as a rule don't call on men they hate."

The hostile look deepened in the man's eyes:

"I tell you, I wanted to see what the man I hate looks like, close to."

"Well, you see—I am just a man like yourself."

"Like me?" The man gave a harsh unpleasant laugh: "*Like me?* the hell you are! Say, do you think life's fair? I put it to you, you bloated million billionaire, do you think life's fair?"

"No!" John answered quickly. "It's damned unfair! But I think that when we are in the worst holes it is our own fault."

He forgot the man—but the man did not forget him.

"Is it my fault that I was born in the gutter? Is it my fault that I am the under dog, to sit here and be lectured to by you because you was born in a bank and laid in a gold-bin?"

John turned to him with a brisk air:

"I am very sorry for you: but your tone must be more civil or this interview will come to a short end! I certainly have no wish to lecture you—I

was thinking," he added with characteristic impulsive frankness, "of my own hole—and of my own fault."

"Hold your jaw!" growled the man: "I don't want none of your guying. *You* in a hole!—with all this!" he nodded toward the room in an insolent way: "I am starving, I tell you!"

"And are you thirsty, too?" This heedless thrust of John's was unfortunate.

"I'll drink as much as I damn please!"

"Certainly,"—John smiled—"you are a free man—you may drink yourself to blazes if you choose. But I will tell you what *I* have learned: we each have a choice in life—and *afterwards* we have to abide by the consequences of that choice."

John pulled open a drawer of his desk, took out a bill and offered it to the man:

"Here is some money—to drink with if you choose."

The man looked at the money with eager eyes, but stronger than appetite rose anger and stronger than thirst flamed rage: he could in no wise understand John's quizzical mood. He pushed John's hand away:

"I won't take your money, damn you! I want things equal!"

"So do I," broke from John. "I wish to God things were equal!"

These words, which came as a cry from John, the wretched man in his own desperation decided was a mocking taunt—so little do men under-



stand each other when each cries out in pain which comes from differing causes! These words coupled with John's whimsical illusive smile were the last straw: fury blazed into action: John saw the man's hand go quickly to his pocket; like a flash he divined its errand, but before he could spring up or cry aloud—before he had even formulated to himself what he had divined—he saw a pistol pointed at his breast and heard a click and then a loud report.

With a curious sharpening of perception which comes in great crises, he knew what had happened: he saw the reflection of it in the man's face: first the fierce look of determination, then the overspreading of a relaxation that comes from the deed done. He felt no pain, none whatever, only a slight sensation in his breast as of an electric prick —but he *knew!*

"He has shot me," John said quietly—and his head fell forward on his desk.

He heard, as in a dream, Furniss the footman, Stewart his valet and the other men-servants rush in—he heard, as in a dream, the scuffle with the man as they dragged him out—he felt, as in a dream, Stewart and some of the women bending over him and loosening his clothes, and the kind old housekeeper trying to staunch the blood which was beginning to flow: but all the while his mind was feverishly following a train of thought, trying to get hold of something that evaded him: some words were saying themselves over and over

in his mind: where had he heard them?—they were so familiar that they seemed a part of his very being:

"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out——"

Where had he heard those words?—Ah! he remembers! Yesterday—the funeral—they had rung through the great church startling his consciousness to an awakened recollection of another time when they had burned themselves into his memory: that other time had been four years ago in the old farm house at Elmcroft: then he had stood at the foot of the long black box which held all that was mortal of his father, and Dr. Meredith had solemnly said the words in a way that made them, thereafter, unforgettable:

"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Yesterday the echo of them had sprung from John's brain where they had been annealed four years before: and with them had sprung new thoughts which were insistently repeating themselves now in this dreamlike confusion.

What had his father to carry with him as he went out into the dark? Poverty and paralysis had been his earthly portion: Kenneth Vandeveer's portion had been a vital life full of vigour up to the moment when the motor had gone over the cliff—great wealth and powerful position: and yet—it was also certain that he could carry nothing out of this world.



The same words had rung with convincing truth through the little room of the humble farm house, and through the lofty arches of the stately church: the same truth had been attested for the infirm farmer, poor and weighted with suffering, and for the prosperous millionaire cut off in the full flush of life:

"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Ah! then what difference does it make what one has, what one is denied, or what one suffers? It is all of such very small account—wealth—power —success—poverty—failure—suffering—joy: in the end there is no difference!—no difference between the penniless paralytic and the magnificent millionaire: between the happy husband and the lonely desolate man: each is folded in a narrow inexorable box with empty hands and left to turn to dust and ashes—for "we brought nothing into this world and it is certain"—it is certain—"we can carry"—we can carry—"nothing"—nothing —nothing—then his brain stopped working, and oblivion engulfed him.

CHAPTER XXIX

"How was the dinner last week, Grace? haven't seen you since," said Mrs. Morgan.

"Of course you mean John Wright's dinner Sally and Pelham?"

Mrs. Morgan nodded.

"It was perfectly beautiful!"

"Do tell us about it," exclaimed Mrs. Lancey.

The three women were seated in Mrs. Barkley cozy library: they had drawn around the brig wood fire which was grateful in the first cold sn of October, before the furnace was lighted.

"It really was the loveliest dinner I ever saw Mrs. Barkley spoke with enthusiasm. "The flo ers were princely—the music was ravishing—a Sally looked a dream!"

"I met that pretty Marvin girl this morning said Mrs. de Lancey, "and she told me that M Barkley looked like a queen."

Grace Barkley smiled her thanks:

"I wore my oriental toggery, the Maharaj jewels: they always please young girls. I was t chaperon, you know. It was a dinner of forty Robert and I were the only married couple the I was supposed to give a matronly air to the oc



sion, but, I assure you, I felt years younger—I AM years younger—than the two Vinton girls with their *blasé* manner and their bored and languid airs. What Sally is going to do with those two girls, the little god of love alone knows!"

"Thank Heaven," said Mrs. de Lancey, "one doesn't have to marry one's sisters-in-law."

"The saints preserve Sally if they did!" cried Grace Barkley. "Pelham is as different from his sisters as a live wire is different from a wire that is burnt out."

"Go on about the dinner, Grace!" begged Mrs. Morgan.

"As I said, the music was enchanting—the house was a bower and Sally looked a dream——"

"She has looked lovely this summer," interrupted Mrs. Morgan. "I saw her at Newport: the new mode of arranging the hair is very becoming to her."

"Nonsense! Pelham Vinton is becoming to her, that's what it is!" said Mrs. Barkley brightly; "I didn't see her all summer. You know she went away directly after the engagement was announced and she only came back to town in time for John's dinner: she has grown really beautiful!"

"How does Ted take it?" asked Mrs. Morgan eagerly.

"Ted!" echoed Mrs. Barkley, surprised. "Why, Ted is delighted, of course: every one is; it is a

splendid match: Ted made just the dearest
wittiest speech I ever heard, at the dinner."

"I thought he was in love with Sally," M
Morgan ventured.

"He is!" responded Mrs. Barkley gaily. "
is in love with every pretty girl in New York:
calls Sally his best Cabinet girl."

"'Cabinet girl?'" Mrs. Morgan looked my
fied.

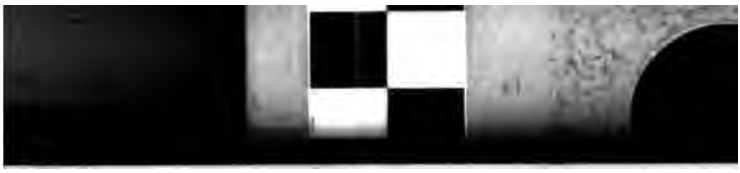
"Yes, Ted has about twenty girls whom he s
he keeps in the Cabinet of his heart because t
are such choice, rare specimens: he says he of
takes them out, and looks at them one after
other and their loveliness makes his mouth wat
he has always told Sally that she was on the f
shelf, in the front row: he and she are awfu
good friends—they have known each other si
they went to kindergarten together."

"It's great fun to see them together," said M
de Lancey, "they are both so amusing!"

"Aren't they?" responded Mrs. Barkley. "
they were screamingly funny at the dinner:
assumed the mock air of an old grandfather:
maintained an attitude toward Pelham—who
six years older than Ted—as though Pelh
were a dangerous and giddy youth taking his
vourite granddaughter away from him. Ted
too funny!"

"Why hasn't Ameda Winthrop come h
yet?" asked Mrs. Morgan, apropos of nothing

"Yes, why hasn't she?" echoed Florence



Lancey, "I thought she intended to be gone only a month."

"Why, oh, why?" Grace Barkley threw out her hands in a dramatic way—the lace fell back from the sleeves of her fascinating tea gown, showing her lovely arms: she made an amusing little gesture and chanted, apparently irrelevantly:

"There once was a siren whose smile
To her net every man did beguile,
But when one man climbed out,
She went off—in a pout—
To the far away West for awhile."

"Which means?" said Mrs. de Lancey.

"Which means," laughed Grace Barkley, "that I am cultivating the trick of limericking to please Bobs. When I put him to sleep he always begs for one: he says: 'Muvver, say some more of those wingly-jingly wowds that sound so jolly.' I wish you to know, mesdames, that my son, at least, recognises me as a poet. Shall I tell you a beautiful limerick that I made for him the other night about the stars? Robert quite liked it."

"Not now!" protested Mrs. de Lancey: "Keep to the point: you are exactly like Congress, Grace, you are always trying to divert the issue. What did you mean by that limerick? I want to know its esoteric meaning."

The playfulness left Grace Barkley: she became frankly serious:

"I will tell you what I mean, although *you know*

perfectly well. That affair between John Wr
and Ameda Winthrop is broken off and I am
ceedingly glad: John Wright is not a man t
in Ameda Winthrop's net."

"John Wright can take care of himsel
fancy!" said Mrs. Morgan.

"Undoubtedly; he has proved it," Mrs. Barl
assented. "But I sometimes feared his care-
ing might delay too long. I am glad that he c
to his own rescue before it was too late. H
young and—with all his suavity and aplomb-
is an idealist."

"John Wright an *idealist?*" exclaimed M
Morgan.

"Certainly, he has the temperament and
heart: naturally he has been carried away by
phenomenal success in New York: but by nat
he is primitive——"

"He is the last person I should call primiti
he is so awfully clever," interrupted Mrs. M
gan.

"The more clever the man of a certain te
perament, the more primitive he is apt to be
all matters involving the emotions."

"That is true," assented Mrs. de Lancey, "
pecially if he has lived close to nature and boo
up to a certain age."

"When he first came to New York Ame
Winthrop was very kind to him," Mrs. Bark
raised her eye-brows, "and he put her on a ped
tal: alas! she didn't belong there."



"Not much!" ejaculated Mrs. de Lancey.

"She didn't help him in any way," continued Mrs. Barkley.

"Help him! I should think not!" Mrs. de Lancey spoke severely: "Did Ameda Winthrop ever help any one on earth but herself?"

"Why did you let the affair run on so long, Grace?" asked Mrs. Morgan: "You knew perfectly well what Ameda Winthrop is, it was for you to warn him—he is so intimate here."

"What could I do? Of course I owe nothing to Ameda Winthrop, nothing whatever: I have never liked her nor approved of her—but one doesn't give another woman away. And I *really* was not anxious for I knew John: I knew his fundamental character from Ted—and Robert says that I have keen insight: I felt it was merely a matter of time when he would see through the veil."

"How do you know that he has really seen through it now?" asked Mrs. Morgan.

"It is obvious. John did not go West with the Winthrop party although Ameda had set her heart on it and had told every one that he was going. I suspected that the affair had collapsed the day of Mrs. Bailey's luncheon. That Boston woman visiting there was enthusing over John, and Ameda said in a tone as neutral as America, 'Really? I have never noticed Mr. Wright especially.' Just fancy!"

"Did she?" both women exclaimed.

"She did indeed! Then when John gave up the Western trip I saw the end had come."

"Perhaps Ameda got tired of him," suggested Mrs. Morgan.

"Not much! No woman could get tired of John Wright: he is too clever and too unusual!"

"That is an admission, Grace."

"It is an admission that he is one of the most interesting men I ever met: Robert thinks so, too, and as for Ted, he is daft about him and always has been: when he first met him at Harvard, Ted wrote home that he had found 'a four-leaf clover of a fellow.'"

"But Mr. Wright has looked troubled lately, don't you think so?" said Mrs. Morgan.

Mrs. de Lancey considered:

"Not troubled so much as ill: I think it is physical: I am *sure* he is not well."

Mrs. Barkley turned quickly:

"You are right, Florence! He is not well. Ted is dreadfully worried about him: he says that John ought to see a doctor but he won't: Ted says he doesn't know how to be ill."

"You don't think it is anything serious, do you?" There was anxiety in Mrs. de Lancey's tone: she had grown very fond of John.

"Not at all! But it is painful—he has had constant neuralgia for months, Ted says, and it has gotten on his nerves: he never had a headache in his life before, nor a toothache, nor any kind of an ache."



"Fancy!" said Mrs. de Lancey: "I can scarcely remember the time when I didn't have neuralgia: I wonder what he would do if he had a few of my lively headaches!"

Mrs. Barkley shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly:

"What would any man do if he had to bear the aches and pains which we women smilingly deny every day of our lives! I can deceive the very elect—which means Robert—Bobs is the only one whom I can't deceive: when I protest that I am feeling fit and fine Bobs comes up to me, puts his little hand on my head and says: 'Muvver darling, you're just pwetending. I see the pain in the back of your eyes.' "

"How is the dear Bobs!" asked Mrs. de Lancey.

"The trouble with John Wright is," Grace Barkley went on, unheeding Mrs. de Lancey's question, "he needs a rest but he never stays away long enough to get the good of the change: Ted wanted him to stay in the Adirondacks but he couldn't, he was in the city practically all summer."

"I know," said Mrs. Morgan. "I asked him several times to come out to Cedarwood but he couldn't come."

Grace Barkley frowned:

"If I ever get to Heaven and old John Remington happens to be there, I will give him a piece of my mind! You know the conditions of the will keep John in town, most of the time: he can't stay

away long enough to get any real benefit: and he fairly worships the country!"

"Grace, I have asked you twice," said Mrs. de Lancey, "and you haven't told me. How is Bobs? —and Betty?" she added as an after-thought.

"They are both splendidly well, thank you. Betty is growing fast. Ted simply ruins her: he laughs at everything she does no matter how naughty it is: she twists Ted around her little finger: and her father indulges her much more than he ever indulged Bobs. She is getting to be a tiny tyrant: she is developing a most impish independence and the spunkiest temper: Bobs came to me the other day and said quite anxiously, 'Muvver, don't you think that Betty is getting to be a little—*just a little*—like the Kaiser?' "

There was a respectful knock at the door.

"Come in," called Mrs. Barkley: the footman entered and announced in apologetic tones:

"Beg pardon, Madam is wanted on the telephone."

"Who is it, Perkins?"

"I can't say, Madam."

"Tell them that I am engaged: I will talk later."

Perkins made a deprecating gesture.

"I told the party that Madam was engaged but they said as how it was important to speak with Madam personally."

"How maddening! I might as well go first as last." Grace Barkley pushed back her chair: "If



you will excuse me: it is really more interrupting to have Perkins trotting back and forth than it is to go and end the matter: if one doesn't go, some persons keep up a bombardment of ambiguous messages: it is easier to speak and have done with it." She gave a little start of remembrance, "Oh, I know! It is Madame, to ask about my new gown: Fifine brought me a message early this morning that there was some hitch about the silver tissue—I should have answered before."

Grace Barkley turned at the door and called back bewitchingly:

"Now, please don't either of you say anything interesting or witty until I come back. I don't want to miss anything."

The picture of her laughing loveliness, her bright rosy colour and her sparkling eyes was in the memory of the two women, when, five minutes later, she returned and stood before them, her pale face drawn and twitching—her eyes haunted with horror.

"O Grace! What is it?" they both exclaimed.

She put out her hand in a groping way against the bookcase for support.

"It is John Wright—he has been SHOT!"

"SHOT?"—The horror spread. The shock was too real for questions: Mrs. de Lancey went to her and laid a tender persuasive hand on her arm:

"Sit down, Grace."

"No—no—wait—I will tell you all I know—it was Robert on the phone—he told Perkins on no

account to tell me it was he: John was shot a
two hours ago—by a crazy crank—he is still a
but unconscious: the housekeeper sent at on
the office for Ted and Robert: they are both t
now: Robert called me just as soon as he pos
could—Oh, hark! There's Bobbie, coming
the stairs: please stop him—somebody—tell
something—*anything*—but don't let him
near me until I can pull myself together: he
John so! Oh, hurry!"

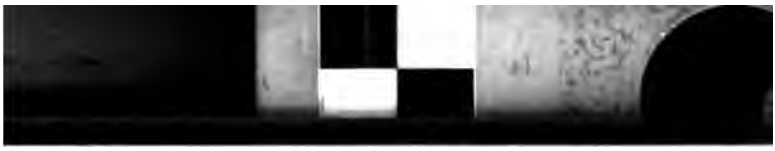
"I'll go," said Mrs. de Lancey; "I'll make
take me up-stairs to see Betty."

"Thank you," and Mrs. Barkley sank in
chair.

Mrs. Morgan rose and began to put on her
Grace Barkley was devoutly thankful that
was moved to go home, she longed to be alon

"Now, Grace, don't worry—it will be all rig
John will get over it." Mrs. Morgan talke
as she was carefully adjusting and arranging
wraps: "I know a man who had five bullets
into him: it was a little mistake in hunting-
friend took him for a deer—such a stupid t
to do!—but he got entirely well and is no
strong and vigorous as ever."

Grace Barkley did not hear her: her thou
were in the Remington house—where she
passed so many gay and happy hours—kee
vigil with her husband and her brother beside
friend. Moreover, she had a swift realisatio
the perpetual tragedy of the world—that fa



shadow which is ever hovering above the gayest and the happiest to fall like a bolt at some unexpected moment—

"O God, it might have been Robert!"

CHAPTER XXX

On the border of Elmcroft, between the villa and the adjoining town, Marion had rented a lit cottage. It was white, vine-embowered, pict esque, and surrounded by wide-spreading trees.

Back of the cottage was an old-time garde there through the summer had blossomed ros spicy pinks, larkspur, snowballs, mignonette a heliotrope, and all the dear old-fashioned flowe of remembrance. Marion had brought some sli from the garden of the Parsonage and these s tended with solicitude in a special little pat which she called her Home-garden.

She had grown to love the cottage where s lived, worked and battled with her memorie The school life she had also grown to love; s felt the sense of accomplishment which is both tonic and a stimulus.

To the bright cosey cottage, unhampered l convention, her friends came to find, in the ti home, a spacious quality, an atmosphere rare Elmcroft—rare in the world. Simplicity, ind pendence and unconventionality, austere stu and exquisite refinement, made the place unusual delightful.

In the largest room of the cottage on the fir

floor, Marion had put her father's books on plain shelves which reached to the ceiling: the walls were literally covered with the well-worn homey-looking, theological and scholarly books.

Old Alice—who had received Marion into her arms at her birth, and who had interpreted the look in the dying eyes of the Parson's wife as a charge to watch over the motherless child—had come back to Marion when she made her new home. With passionate love Alice was determined that her "bonnie lass" should not miss any more than could be avoided of the external things that had formerly made her life.

She studied Marion's comfort with the zeal and zest of staunch affection and made bright little feasts when guests came to the cottage, serving toothsome and delicious home-dainties that no one could make as she did.

She had brought from her Scottish home a veneration for intellect: and her respect for Marion increased as she watched her moving in the world of books: hitherto, her bearing toward Marion had been motherly—as though Marion were still the baby whom she had so tenderly nursed: but now a shade of the veneration which she had always held toward Dr. Meredith came into her attitude toward this earnest, studious girl, who pondered long hours over those solemn and respectable tomes that had belonged to the Parson.

When Marion sat intent upon some yellowed page of an old volume, Alice would move softly,

lay fresh wood on the fire, light the lamp if need be, all the while looking at Marion with humble homage in her faded eyes. But when Marion became the reckless girl again, then straightway Alice was again 'a regular old tyrant,' as Marion called her, caressing the hard and knotty hand.

Marion had begun to be happy once more—in spite of her loneliness. Something of the glad throb of life had begun to stir again beneath her pain: it was the happiness which inevitably comes from any earnest interest and eager service for others.

Her life was growing every day more interested and more interesting, more touched with colour as she merged her personal life in the work of the world: she felt the joy of the creator as she took plastic young minds in her hands to shape them for the future—she felt that she was making history in training the mothers of men.

"I will never marry," she constantly said to herself: "I shall never be a mother, but I can do the larger work of motherhood, in passing on the torch to the next generation. I shall have thousands of children, instead of three or four, and perhaps I can do something for the race! Oh, the joy of sowing seeds that will spring up when I am gone!" Thereupon, Marion, in a rush of rapture and exhilaration, would fling her arms wide to the sky and feel the thrill of creative power pass through her.

Her loneliness was her opportunity: she threw



herself into her task with an enthusiasm that kindled her to a quicker life: she took her inspiration and her revelation with a spontaneous youthful abandon, as other girls take their pleasure: she was ardent, young, eager, adventurous of spirit—and the overcoming of despair, the victory over sorrow had, to her, the dauntless quality of a brave adventure.

Her work did not lie in the schoolroom alone: she was a great favourite with the girls; they came quickly in touch with her and felt in her a vital comprehension, a living sympathy: therefore, during the summer when the school was closed they had brought their secrets, their joys and their sorrows to the little cottage and poured them into her willing ear; Marion sympathetically lived their lives with them.

In this way new life came to her own soul—new strength to enable her to make of her own past joys an altar of remembrance and of inspiration. This does not mean that she was free from hours of desolation, when the world was black and her soul stood grey in the shadow: but Marion was made of the stuff that must either sink in despair or rise on wings—and she had risen!

She knew the glory of life to be apart from the limitation or the measure of the personal life: moreover, she had the great dower which ever spread for her a miraculous feast of refreshment —she loved Nature! She had with Nature a living bond: she knew Her in all Her moods: she loved

the freshness of the early morning and she loved the mystic spell of the twilight shadows: she revelled in the sparkle of the sunshine and she revelled equally in the cool dash of the rain: she would hasten out into a down-pour, throw back her head, turn her face towards the sky and let the rain splash upon her hair, her cheeks and her body: old Alice was then in despair:

"Miss Marion, Miss Marion, child," she would protest, "don't do them rash and foolish things with yourself—going out into the rain with no umbrella or no rubbers! My, my, whatever shall I do?"

"'Are ye out of your mind, O Alice my nurse?'" Marion mocked her laughingly.

"Out of my mind! Indeed and I wish you had as good a use of your wits as I have of mine."

"Then be sensible about the rain—" and Marion would give her an affectionate little shake: "the rain gives me new life, how can it hurt me?—doesn't it come straight from the sky?"

"No, it don't come from the sky, Miss Marion; what a foolish notion: it comes from the horrid black clouds that shut out the sky, and it's such a very wet rain."

This conversation took place with the frequency of the coming of storms: Marion would end it by running out to the woods fragrant with wet balsam odours and glistening with raindrops—to play with Pan.



Men say that Pan is dead but Marion knew that Pan is still alive: she always found him in the woods, in sunshine and in storm, ready to play with her and to pipe his music for her dancing.

Older and wiser ones than Marion have testified to the re-birth that comes to an unspoiled nature in the woods. There Marion's troubles fell from her and she was again a free-hearted child.

With all her soaring, Marion was domestic and human: she loved the heights, but she loved human hearth-fires as well and she sorely missed them: the severing of the beautiful companionship with her father had left her with an abiding sorrow, an aching void.

And John?—Ah! it were best not to think of John! But when she was in the woods—she found mystic secrets there which comforted her, brought her new life and new strength. She would come back to the cottage glad of heart.

As she moved in and out of her low white doorway in her simple muslin with her golden crown of braids upon her small proud head, she was good to look at. She had grown more lovely in these two years—the shadows that lingered in her eyes gave a touch of pathos to her loveliness like minor music.

It was a beautiful day: Marion's lesson-hours were in the afternoon, she did not have to be at school until noon: she had, therefore, taken a morning hour in the woods—changing, under the

touch of autumn, from green to gold: the leaves were gay with colour, the bloom of hardihood and opulence had taken the place of the dainty fragile summer flowers: the snap of life and tonic was in the air and the sky was blue with the vivid blue of the autumn: brilliant goldenrod fringed the border of the woods and belated Michaelmas daisies gave a deeper beauty to the grass. As Marion ran in, fresh and sparkling after her happy hour, old Alice handed her the papers and her mail. Marion threw down the mail and eagerly opened one of the New York papers. She had lived a thousand lives and died a thousand deaths since that fateful day in August when the incredible War was declared, to stagger and dishearten those who—like Marion—were constantly working for World-peace.

Marion's mind was of the International type: she shared the tragic events across the water; she was watching with the women: she was following the marches of the men and living with them in the trenches. Day after day she studied the problems confronting the various governments, and read with eager interest the speeches of the various statesmen in England, France and Germany. She was keenly eager to know each hour's report.

Alice had hurried away, after handing her the mail; Marion was alone: quickly she opened the paper to look for the war news: as she did so,



some flaming headlines caught her eye; she uttered a low cry. This is what she read:

"John Remington Wright, the well-known multimillionaire, was shot yesterday at his residence. His condition is serious."

Then followed an account of the shooting, of the man who had been shot, and of the man who had done the deed, with many sensational details.

Marion read the ghastly account to the end; the paper fell from her hand: she laid her head against her chair and the room seemed to spin in space: desperately she fought back the waves of faintness which threatened her.

"Land o' mercy sakes, Miss Marion, what's the matter?" Alice stood in the doorway: Marion told her briefly.

"Well, I'm dead beat between you two: you faintin' in the sittin'-room and Eben chatterin' in the kitchen, as white as the table-cloth."

"Eben?—*Here?*—" Marion roused quickly: "Send him to me at once."

"Now, sit still, child, you ain't fit to see no one."

"Don't waste time, Alice! Send Eben to me *at once.*"

When Marion spoke in that tone Alice knew enough to obey. She went back to the kitchen

where Eben was walking up and down like a caged lion.

"She ain't ought to see you, but come along."

When Eben saw Marion's pale face, white lips and the open paper on the floor, he jerked his big thumb towards the paper:

"You know, then?"

"Yes. O Eben—" Marion reached out her hand to Eben: he took it awkwardly—"have you heard anything more?"

Eben found a crumpled telegram in his pocket and smoothing it out handed it to Marion.

"Mr. Eben Hankins, Elmcroft,"—she read—"Come at once. Mr. Wright has been shot. He's out of his head, but he keeps calling constant for you.

"STEWART."

"You are going?" questioned Marion.

"Goin'? 'Course I'm goin' but I thought I'd come an' tell you first. I forgot you'd see it in the paper."

"Eben—" Marion laid her hand upon his arm—"Mr. John is—my—my oldest friend—will you promise to let me know as soon as you *possibly* can just how he is and what the Doctor says?"

"Sure," grunted Eben. Marion knew that Eben was making a violent effort to keep back emotions which were new to him.

"Eben!" She looked at him with pleading



eyes: "I shall watch every second until I hear from you: the papers are so unreliable. I *must* know how he is."

"I'll telegraph."

"And you will tell me the truth?"

"You don't s'pose I'd tell you a lie, do you?"

"You might, to spare me."

Eben shook his head:

"I don't think it never spares no one to lie to 'em to-day 'bout what you've got to tell 'em to-morrow."

"When are you going?"

"The next train—ten-thirty. Now don't look so down, Mees Marion." Eben was talking for his own comfort as well as for Marion's—"Meester John'll be all right. He's as healthy as a registered bull."

"He will be better when you are with him, Eben."

Eben assumed an unconscious dignity.

"Wal—I ain't no valet, but thank the Lord I've got more sense than that Stewart fellow an' when Meester John wants me, my place is there: it al'ays was, in trouble."

Marion did not speak, but she lifted her hand and gave a little caressing stroke to the stalwart shoulder clad in its rough homespun. Eben remembered that stroke for many days.

Impatiently Marion lived through the long hours at school listening to recitations; she was glad to hasten home and watch from the window

for the first sight of the messenger boy wh
bring the tidings, on the speed of a bicy
last she saw him coming; she went to t
herself, tore open the telegram with im
haste, and read:

"Miss Marion Meredith,
"Rose Cottage,
"Elmcroft.

"He ain't so sick as I thought he was
sicker than Stewart says he is. The docto
say nothin'.

"Eben Hank

This was ambiguous but on the whole
more comforting than the papers had bee



CHAPTER XXXI

THE days passed slowly to weeks: the autumn turned to winter and the heavy snow had been falling through the long December night: it had been heaping highways and hedges, hill, valley and meadow-land with a marvellous beauty—white and sparkling: and still the elfin flakes were falling in a dancing swirl.

Marion was out before breakfast to revel in the witchery of the day, to penetrate the crystal chambers of the frost and the secret places of the snow. She made a lovely picture; her white woollen dress touched with fleecy fur, the little white woollen toque on her shining hair, made her seem a very part of the day: old Alice, watching her, thought she looked like a snow-flake herself.

Marion loved the snow—that miracle which falls so silently covering with loveliness the blackest and most barren places, spreading a softening purity over the roughest scars of Nature.

She enjoyed it as a great whole—an enveloping, marvellous mantle glorifying the earth—and she loved it, also, in exquisite detail: the surprising wonder of each tiny particle of crystal—the infinite variety of star-form and flower-form, of plant-form and life-form in every flake that fell—made Marion glow with pleasure.

Under the clouds of pearly grey, still snow-freighted, she walked with lifted head—to catch the snow-flakes. They nestled upon her forehead and on her dark eyelashes but when they fell upon her scarlet lips they melted from the warmth of her sweet breath.

As Marion played with the falling snow, she was listening. It came at last—the postman's whistle! As he came down the road, she ran to the gate to meet him: the cordial greetings and good-byes, to which the postman looked forward as a bright spot in his day, were cut short: she could brook no delay this morning.

When he was gone Marion ran to a rustic seat beneath the spreading branches of a naked oak and with eager haste and fingers numb with cold, she went through the pile of letters until she came to Eben's cramped handwriting.

Eben's letters had been her beacon lights since that morning, in October, when she had watched him go. Marion apprehended what it had cost him to write, for he had once confided to her, in the happy days of long ago, that he would rather 'hoe a field of potatoes or fight a plague of potato bugs any day' than write a letter: but it was late in December and he had not failed to keep his promise: until this last week letters had come regularly: characteristic, terse, brusque, with no unnecessary words, devoid of all softening or sentiment, they had, nevertheless, kept her well-informed, and given her the exact situation with gruff directness



as, perhaps, more eloquent communications would not have done.

Twice Eben had run down to the Farm for a hurried day of business: then Marion had gathered fuller information from him by diplomatic and clever questioning.

He had told her that John's splendid constitution had rallied at once from the physical shock of the shooting, after the ball was extracted: but that then he had sunk into a low fever bringing great exhaustion, which the Doctors said was owing to the state he had been in at the time he was shot.

"The Doctors say it was overwork," Eben added gruffly, "but they don't know nothin': it's *over-idlin'*, that's what 'tis—a man gets soft if he's idle—an' ain't fit to be shot: Meester John ain't done no work since he left the farm, so he was too soft for shootin'."

He told her that "Meester John's so down he don't pay no 'tention to nothin': he's just like a stranger." Eben grunted: "He ain't well, Mees Marion—he ain't well."

"Oh, no, Eben!—" Marion answered sorrowfully: then in her clever way she led Eben on to more revealing.

"He lies there in a room most as big as a ten-acre lot: silver an' gold an' jim-cracks 're just as common as pebbles: but Monday mornin' I was sittin' there a-lookin' 'round an' a-thinkin' an' all of a sudden Meester John's hand fumbled out

for my hand an' he says, very faintlike, says h
—'Eben,' says he, 'I like my room at the farm
better'n this,' says he. Then he fell asleep."

Eben gave her other pictures.

"The nurse don't pretty much, an' she's as up
an' down as a pump-handle but she knows what
she knows an' she does what she does."

On the subject of Stewart, Eben was more
expansive than was his habit: "That valet-fool
ain't no good nohow: his clothes are a joke: he
can't bend his head 'cause his collar's so tight:
the only thing that he can do is to walk quiet: he
can do that: I wisht I could; my boots creak like
a mowin' machine: he knows I can't an' he throws
it up to me, without sayin' a word: one day when
Meester John was worst I took off my shoes to
go into his room in my stockin' feet so's not to
make a noise: Stewart laughed inside fit to kill
himself: he didn't laugh outside: he swallered his
laugh behind his hands but he shook all over.
He don't know what to do for Meester John no
more'n nothin': I told him some things, but you
'might as well play jigs to a milestone' as to try
to learn him. He looks at me same as a crow
looks at a scarecrow: he wishes I'd go home, but
Meester John keeps callin' for me, so there I be."

Marion had counted the hours since Eben's last
letter: there had not been one for five days—
what did it portend?

The blood left her face and lips—she was ashen-
white as she tore open the envelope; her hand



trembled so violently that the crude writing danced before her eyes—as she read:

"DEAR MISS MARION,

"i take my pen in hand to tell you that Mr. Johns got to die when i wrote the shot had heeled since the bulet was took out i mean the place where it was so the doctors couldn't make it out what was the matter with all them bad spells yesterday they got another doctor and he says that Mr. Johns got to die he says it wont be long i cant write no more now but i promised to let you know the news so now you know if you got any message for Mr. John just write it down good and plain and ile read it to him

"yours respectful

"EBEN HANKINS."

Marion sat motionless in the cold: she looked as silent as the winter, as frozen as the surface of the little brook, as white as the snow which fell around her; for the space of five minutes she sat holding the breathless silence: then she rose.

"Poor Eben," she said, and shuddered. She walked quickly to the cottage: the cheeks that had been as white as the snow flushed suddenly with warm colour: her feet seemed to gain wings as she walked.

"Alice—Alice!" she called. "Quick—please! Come and help me! We must make haste—I am going to New York—you are to go with me——"

"O, Miss Marion—" Alice protest
snowing—you'll——"

"Hurry, Alice." Marion's voice wa
"I wish to catch the ten-thirty train: th
a moment to lose—hurry!"



CHAPTER XXXII

It was four o'clock when the train steamed into New York and Marion found herself in the midst of a confusing turmoil—pushed by a jostling crowd, the prey of frantically shouting chauffeurs and deafened by many strange confusing sounds.

She went with Alice to a quiet hotel and made her preparations; in half an hour, fresh and trim without soil or stain of travel, she was ringing the door-bell of the old Remington house.

This young woman had not learned her gospel in Vanity Fair nor found her ethics in Philistia: she felt it was the right thing to do this daring deed and, therefore, she did it; although she knew that John's world would shrug questioning shoulders, and that her own world would shake disapproving heads at her audacity and her departure from proper maidenly circumspection, she cared not one straw: but, all the same, when she stood upon the steps of John's house, embarrassment and nervous fright shook her like an ague; she felt that she could not speak, that it would be impossible to make her dry lips utter a sound.

By the time the great bronze door was opened, however, she had found her calm, her poise, and her voice.

"I wish to see Mr. Wright's head nurse," she said.

There was an air of authority about her which the footman could not disregard.

"Yes, Miss." And he opened the door wide for her to enter. "Who shall I say, Miss, wishes to see her, Miss?"

Marion handed the man her card: upon it she had written—"May I see you at once? It is important. I will detain you but a moment."

The man drew aside the heavy curtains and Marion stepped into the splendid drawing-room. The room gave her a vivid shock: she felt in every corner of it the ghost of the brilliant life that had been and the presence of the awful hush that was. With quick intuition, she felt the throb and heard the imagined echoes of gay scenes: with her clairvoyant sense—which always went at once to the central point—she walked straight to "The New Day"—the picture that John loved. She saw the early light of coming day, the morning star, the pink-petalled apple blossoms—and she understood!

That was cruel of Fate—it almost broke her down. She clinched her hands hard and struggled with a threatening tide: what would happen if the nurse, when she came, should find a noisy weeping woman in this silent house of grief?

"Miss Meredith, you desire to speak with me? I beg that you will make haste: I have no time



to spare: I should not have come down but you wrote that it was something important."

The cool voice was like a dam to the rising tide: the moment had come: Marion met it: she faced the trim competent woman, as cool in manner as the nurse's institutional self.

"Is Mr. Wright very ill?" she asked quietly.

"Yes."

The single syllable was given with the clear decision of a knell.

"Is there no hope?"

"None whatever." The nurse's voice was professional.

"May I see him for five minutes?"

The nurse looked surprised:

"That is quite impossible, Miss Meredith."

"Oh, no!"

There was both persuasion and determination in the two syllables: "I *must* see him: I have a message for him."

"I am sorry, but the Doctor's orders are explicit."

Marion laid her hand upon the nurse's arm:

"I know—for I have nursed my father—that sometimes disobedience is the highest obedience: Mr. Wright must—die——"

Marion caught her breath—"There is something I *must* say to him before that hour! It will not hurt him, I am sure: it may—it may—help him. *Please* let me see him—for five minutes."

The nurse looked at Marion: she was trained

to read character and to draw conclusions quickl
something surged above the professional—som
thing warm and living showed for a moment: s
was a woman after all beneath the institutionalis
which she wore like her uniform.

"Come," she said, and led the way.

When they reached the ante-room the nur
turned:

"Wait here, Miss Meredith. I will prepare M
Wright: he is *very* weak."

When the nurse returned Marion had remov
her hat and gloves. The nurse, as a professiona
noted this wise act with approval: as a woma
she was charmed with the fragile beauty whi
was more pronounced when the shining crow
which had been hidden by hat and veil, was u
covered.

"Remember, Miss Meredith, there must be n
excitement."

"Certainly not," said Marion, quietly.

When Marion entered John's bedroom, he
heart stood still as she saw the gaunt emaciate
man upon the bed, watching the door with eage
cavernous eyes: she steadied herself and spok
with composure:

"John."

He looked at her in a dazed way.

"Are you a dream?" he said so low she coul
scarcely hear him. She went to the bedside.

"I am Marion, John: I am come to ask you t
forgive me—will you forgive me?"



His startled eyes searched her face.

"'*Forgive you?*'" he faltered: "Have you come to mock me, Marion?"

"I am come to beg your forgiveness: I did you a very great wrong—I lied to you!"

"'*You lied?*'" His feeble voice ran the gamut of astonishment and of pleading to have the meaning made plainer.

"I told you—I told you—that I hated you!—and that then I forgot: it was a lie, John—a terrible lie! I never hated you—I never forgot—I tried to—but I could not. When your letter came—I knew you loved me—and oh, I was glad—glad—but I sent you no word: it was cruel—wicked—I could not write—my pride was too strong. But I come now to tell you the truth: I have always loved you—I never stopped loving you—not for a single second: I never forgot—*not for a single second.*" She slipped to her knees and took his outreaching hand. "I love you—John—Ah, I love you—I love you."

Transforming light broke over John's sunken face: he closed his eyes and seemed to be trying to hold unconsciousness at bay—Marion waited; at last he opened his eyes eloquent with unspoken response and whispered:

"I love you, Marion!"

Those four words—uttered solemnly in his altered ghostly voice—had the majestic dignity of Gregorian music. After an instant he added so low that she had to bend down to hear:

"Can *you* forgive *me,* Marion?" She put her finger on his lips with an infinitely caressing tenderness:

"Ah! My Love! it was all the same—we each sinned against the highest—we each *denied* love you denied it for power—I denied it for pride—it was the same sin."

There was a moment of wordless communion as she knelt with his hand in hers: then her heart cried out:

"O John, how we have suffered!—but *now* we know!"

"'Now we know——' And—now—it is—too late!"

The note of despair in John's voice was unendurable. Marion put her free hand upon his forehead:

"John, listen!—*there is no such word as too late!*" He looked at her questioningly—she bent yet a little nearer to him: "Love is ours for ever.'

"'For ever?'—what proof have you?" he whispered eagerly, wistfully, as one seeking information from a trusted guide before going out upon a dark and unknown road.

Gathering cosmic help from the source and centre of all help, Marion was enabled to smile her own beautiful, tender smile as she looked down on him:

"I have no proof—one can only *prove* material things—but I *know.*"

"You *know,* Marion?"



"Yes, my Love. I cannot explain to you *how* I know it—but I KNOW. There is nothing I am so sure of as eternity—and the eternity of love."

Then Marion kissed him on the lips: John received the kiss as a man might receive a sacrament: after that he lay quite still: he was hovering between consciousness and unconsciousness.

Marion breathed a wordless benediction over him—and left the room.

When John opened his eyes, an hour later, the nurse was standing by his side:

"I am better, Miss Allen," he whispered.

"Good!" said Miss Allen, as she gave him his medicine.

The Doctors came, and were surprised to see a marked change in John—a lower temperature and a more even pulse; a quiet had followed the excessive restlessness which had been so difficult to control during the past month.

"Watch him closely, Miss Allen; we will be in again at nine: there is a change that surprises us: that last medicine is doing excellent work—excellent work, Miss Allen: you might increase the dose to two minims."

And the clever Doctor in charge looked self-congratulatory.

"Very good, Sir," Miss Allen said aloud, but to herself she said, "The first thing doctors should learn to know is that there are many things they do not know."

CHAPTER XXXIII

NOTWITHSTANDING his apparent rally, the night was a desperate struggle for John: he alternated between intense pain and extreme exhaustion—between semi-consciousness and unconsciousness. The Doctors, however, on their morning visit, were encouraged to find that the heart-action retained the improvement of the night before—a hopeful sign.

John had at last fallen asleep; the nurse on duty had taken her seat of vigil a little away from the bed that she might leave more air for his breathing: from time to time she bent over John, counted his respiration and lightly touched his pulse: she was rejoiced to note that his sleep was more quiet and his breathing more regular.

About ten o'clock John opened his eyes: he was awake and fully conscious: but he made no move, no sign, for he feared that the nurse would interrupt the surprising good that had come to him with his awakening: he did not even ask for water, for which his fever-parched throat thirsted, lest he should lose that good.

Slowly the ghastly grey veil had begun to lift —that veil which had hung so long between him-



self and the outer world, making everything shadowy and dim: the room defined itself, the furniture took form, articles shaped themselves into definite objects: and—what was best of all—his mind was entirely clear: he was more acutely conscious than he had been since the hour of the shooting: since that hour he had been for the most part delirious, or in a torpor: even when he was conscious, everything had been hazy and obscure to him: yesterday, when Marion was there, acute consciousness had flamed bright for a few moments, then it had been lost in the unspeakable suffering of the night; but now it had come again, complete and vivid—he could think straight, he could remember, he could reason, as he had not thought, remembered nor reasoned for six weeks.

He looked at the room: elegance, luxury and beauty were everywhere: when he had first possessed all these superb things they had excited and delighted him: later they had maddened and galled him: now he was neither excited nor maddened by them: he was neither delighted nor galled by them: they had become utterly trifling and unimportant.

John is aware that his Hour has come!—that the cord is broken—that the brave fight which the Doctors are making is in vain: and he knows—with that solemn prescience, which is the dread Herald of approaching death—that the grim mystery is not far off.

His brain works with swift action. His life is ended—and that life has been a failure!

The six long weeks of physical pain and mental confusion fall away: clearly he re-lives that last evening before he was shot: he recalls vividly the revelation that had come to him that night—the rush of great regret for his failure—for his cowardly weakness—his surrender to pain: he recalls his resolution to redeem, as far as possible, that failure—his determination to make of his character something worthy to pass on to posterity as his testamentary bequest. He remembers the brave plans and the new thoughts that had been thronging through his mind when the pistol ball entered his breast and stopped his brain—plans to atone for his wasted opportunities, thoughts of the larger life he had determined to live, the things he had determined to try to do in spite of the material handicap, the victory he had resolved to win over his moral weakness in spite of pain.

And now—God help him—IT IS TOO LATE! All is over! Irrevocable Death is near! He is going out into Silence—into Nothingness.

A horror of great darkness seizes him, a bitter anguish shakes his frame, the cold sweat breaks out in great beads upon his forehead. In the horror of the darkness the evil face of the man who shot him takes shape: in the shadows he stands, looking at John with vindictive eyes and hissing once again the words that he had hissed at him that fatal day—"Men like us *hate* men like you!"



Swift to John's mind comes the realisation of another failure.

Even on that evening before he was shot—when he had determined to arise from his "slough of despond," and be a conqueror over pain—he had been but an egotist: he had thought only of himself—of winning his own peace, of fulfilling his own manhood, of finding the star of his own destiny: he had not thought of the struggling, starving mass of men, women and children, like the wretched being who had shot him. The world is crowded, choked with desperate derelicts like that man—and what had he done for them, or planned to do for them?—Oh, yes! money!—he had given freely of his infamous surplus—but what had he *done* to change their hatred?—NOTHING!

Now in the awful hour of Death HATE encircles him: perhaps the women hate him—and the little children: O God! the little children!

Mistakes—Mistakes—Mistakes!—his life has been nothing but Mistakes! He, who had started with high resolve and ardent determination to make of life a great achievement, has made of it only a Tragedy of Errors.

If he could but live a little while!—if he might have but one more year, in which to square his accounts with posterity, to pay the debt he owes his own soul, to make at least one worthy entry on life's page—to leave behind him as he goes out!

Just one little year! He would atone—he would make good—he would work so hard—to rise—to

win victory over self!—but there is no time—
time!—IT IS TOO LATE!

"Too late?"—the shadowy vision of Mari
bends over him, love in her eyes, tenderness
every line of her: she holds, as love ever holds,
shining lamp unto the feet that are going dov
into the dark cold Valley: the echo of her wor
rings out—*"There is no such word as too late.*
——"There is nothing I am so sure of as Ete
nity!" ETERNITY? Ah! he does not need anoth
year of Time if there be ETERNITY!

Again the mortal veil of torpor fell—and
was blank. After a few moments it lifted on
again,—and John became aware that the nur
was giving him some tiny particles of ice: th
brought cooling and comfort: he closed his ey
that she might leave him to himself: his mi
took up again with vivid clearness the though
which were broken off when the veil fell.

Mistakes—yes, his life has been nothing b
Mistakes—and yet—and yet—he has *learned!*
God, he has learned!—it may be he has learne
most by his very Mistakes—by his very sins!

Mortality is at an end—Time is ebbing fast-
the "Now" of life is over—but if there be anothe
chance—IF THERE BE!—then all that he has learne
from his Mistakes will be the foundation that wi
advantage him! — Perhaps — perhaps — wh
knows?——

He turns his head upon the pillow—it is almos



as though some one had spoken in the room, so distinctly do the familiar lines of Browning ring verbally through his clairvoyantly clear brain—

"What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever!"

Suddenly it seems to John that an ineffable Light dawns in the darkness and slowly fills the place with splendour: he tries to raise himself as though to meet a mighty Presence.

A sense of powerful expansion possesses him—his feeble and emaciated body is suffused by a warm, swift-flowing current, his paralysed nerves tingle, his dulled senses thrill, a tide of joy—exultant joy throbs through him.

"Marion," he whispers hoarsely, "Marion, you are right! *I know it now!* MAN HAS FOREVER!"

The nurse hastened to his side:

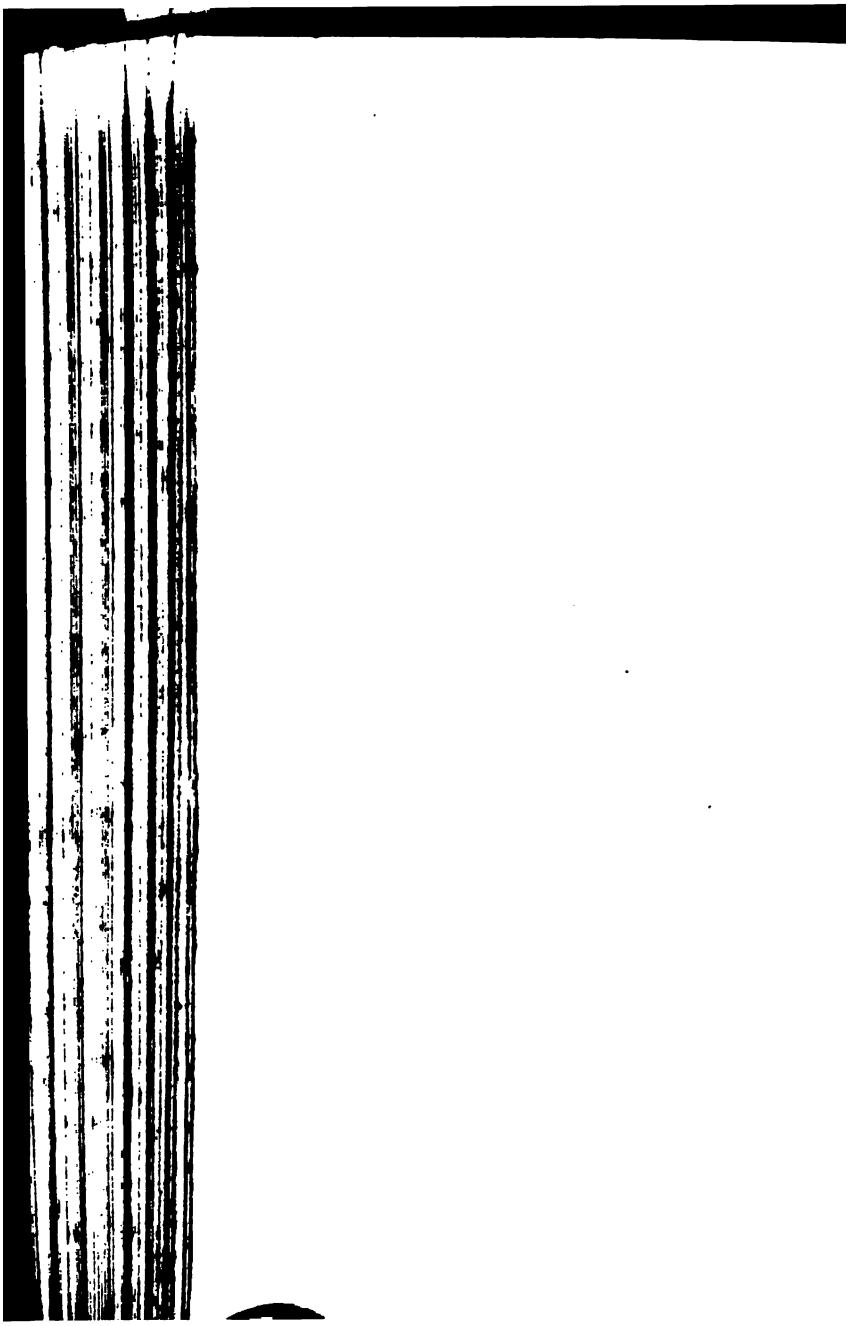
"Do you want anything, Mr. Wright?—are you in pain?"

But John Remington Wright had passed beyond all human want—beyond all human pain: and on his face there was a strange tranquillity, a majestic peace.

THE END







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